THE VANITY BOX

C N AND A M WILLIAMSON

"They did not smile, or appear to be particularly pleased to see each other"

The Vanity Box

BY C. N. WILLIAMSON

With Frontispiece in Colors
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The Vanity Box

CHAPTER I

"PLEASE let Mrs. Forestier know that Sir Ian and Lady Hereward have come."

"Yes, my lady. She is in the rose-garden. I will tell her at once," said the butler, who had opened the door.

He rather expected that the visitors would propose going out of doors to find his mistress; for they had been away for a fortnight, and Lady Hereward was a great admirer of the rose-garden, which was now at the height of its June glory. But the weather that day was sullenly hot, with a still, perfumed heat like the heat of the tropics, and Lady Hereward was looking tired. Evidently, as there was no motor or carriage at the door, she and Sir Ian must have walked the two miles and a half from Friars' Moat to Riding Wood House, and though most of the way — taking the short cut — lay in forest shadow, this windless heat would be oppressive among crowding trees.

The butler moved toward the drawing-room door, but Lady Hereward stopped him. "We will sit here in the hall," she said. "It's delightfully cool." So

speaking, she pushed down the long gray glove on her right arm, glancing at her bracelet watch. "We're very early," she went on. "We must have walked faster than we thought. We allowed ourselves too much time."

In pulling down her glove, Lady Hereward dropped something which fell noiselessly upon a polar-bear rug, and lay glittering, half buried in the silver-white fur. "My vanity box!" she exclaimed. "Stupid of me! I'm always dropping it."

The butler stooped rheumatically to pick up the little gold case, but the lady's husband was before him, and the old servant pottered away to call his mistress, thinking, as he had often thought before, how charmingly courteous Colonel Sir Ian Hereward invariably was to his wife. She liked and needed a good deal of attention, a good deal of waiting upon, as the observant Brewster was well aware; yet Sir Ian never failed, never seemed bored or impatient, as many husbands did after years of marriage. But then, if he were more devoted than ordinary husbands, her ladyship was more attractive than ordinary wives. Not that she was precisely beautiful, nor was she precisely young. Every one knew the distinguished officer's age—forty-one; and Lady Hereward was said to be some months older than Sir Ian, who was her distant cousin as well as her husband; but she did not look a day over thirty; and if she were not a beauty, she was interesting and

unusual. "Like a proud sort of Madonna," the old man described her to himself as he went toward the rose-garden, to tell Mrs. Forestier that her luncheon guests had arrived, a little earlier than expected.

There was a portrait — one among many on the oak-panelled walls — which for some reason fascinated Sir Ian Hereward; and whenever he came to Riding Wood, he always stood in front of it, even if he had to find some excuse for doing so, looking up at the painted, unsmiling face with a curious, reluctant interest, as if he saw it for the first time.

It was not necessary to invent an excuse now, since he was alone with his wife, waiting for their hostess to appear; nevertheless he walked about the hall a little, before making his way to the portrait, picking up a book or two on the fat-legged Jacobean table in the middle of the flagged floor, and then moving on by slow degrees, pausing here and there to glance at some other portrait. This was not a deliberate plan carried out to cloak his real intention, unless from himself, for he had no idea that his wife knew or cared about his interest in the picture; yet he was always drawn to it, in spite of a certain desire to resist. He tried to persuade himself that he thought of that portrait as he thought of others in the hall at Riding Wood, merely as a fine piece of work by a great artist. It had been painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and was a family treasure. Once a few years ago, it had gone

away to an exhibition, having been lent by Mr. Forestier, since dead; and during the time of its absence Sir Ian had not visited Riding Wood.

When her husband began his wanderings round the hall, Lady Hereward seized the opportunity to open her vanity box, and look at herself in the tiny mirror inside. She knew perfectly well what Sir Ian's goal was, and that, having reached it, he would not be likely to move until he heard Mrs. Forestier's footsteps. She knew perfectly well, too, why he was drawn to the portrait, and the fascination it had for him annoyed her extremely; still, as she scorned to refer to the subject, the fact remained that he would look at the portrait, and she might as well avail herself of the three or four minutes during which his back was turned. Never for an hour did she forget that she was a year older than Ian, or cease to yearn for her lost youth, or abandon the struggle to keep its semblance. Never for a moment did she fall into the error of letting her husband or her friends guess that she was engaged in a struggle. Nobody dreamed how unremitting were the efforts this Madonna-faced lady made to retain the softness and smoothness and slimness which belonged to her past. To be sure, she was known to carry a vanity box, but nobody ever saw her peep into it, and her fondness for the little gold case was counted as one with her devotion to jewelry. This was her only selfish hobby, and though

she allowed herself to wear but a few jewels at a time, she owned some for which she might have been envied by richer women.

While Sir Ian gazed at the portrait, his wife glanced hastily at her own reflection in three inches by two of mirror. Her long oval face was white, and there were shadows under the light blue eyes. Her thin but beautifully cut lips were pale and dry, and the brown hair, softly folding down on either side of the pure forehead, almost covering the ears, lacked lustre. Lady Hereward felt disappointed in herself, although the wide gray hat, which dress and gloves matched, was becoming in shape. She took a tiny powder-puff out of the gold vanity box, and gave a pearly effect to her pallor; then, a touch of pink salve (not vulgar red) outlined the delicate curve of the lips; and last of all, the dove-wing folds of hair were pulled a little more over the ears, which were not as pretty or well made as everything else about Lady Hereward.

"You two dears! how good of you to come, and how glad I am to see you both!" cried Mrs. Forestier's voice at the door.

She was a small, dark woman of large enthusiasms, rather gushing, and perhaps even somewhat insincere — at least Sir Ian thought her so; but he had loved her dead husband dearly, therefore he had a kindly if somewhat contemptuous toleration for her, and an almost romantic affection for Riding Wood.

Mrs. Forestier, bright black eyes shining, dimples twinkling, almost ran to greet Lady Hereward, both plump hands outstretched. The two women presented a strong contrast to one another as they kissed: Lady Hereward tall, slim, dignified and gracious; Mrs. Forestier short, round, energetic, with a rich, peachy bloom of complexion.

"I *am* lucky to get you at such short notice," she went on.

"We're always delighted to come here, you know," said Lady Hereward, "and we haven't been back from Paris long enough to have made any engagements."

Mrs. Forestier released her friend, and moved a few steps toward Sir Ian.

"Only to think of my keeping you waiting!" she reproached herself.

"It wasn't more than five minutes, and Ian loves mooning about among the portraits," said Lady Hereward.

"Don't you think, Milly, that the Sir Joshua by the staircase reminds one a tiny bit of Terry Ricardo, as she used to be? Heaven knows what she's like *now*." And Mrs. Forestier glanced at the picture which had been occupying Sir Ian's attention.

Millicent Hereward studied the portrait from a distance for a moment before answering, as if she had never noticed any resemblance, and needed to think the question over.

"Perhaps it does, a tiny bit, now you speak of it; though of course Teresina Ricardo couldn't touch Lady Catherine for beauty," she replied at last.

"Perhaps Sir Joshua's *idea* of Lady Catherine," amended Mrs, Forestier. "If he could have had Teresina for a model, very likely he would have made her even handsomer than Lady Catherine. What do you think, Sir Ian? You used to know Terry in India."

"She was more fascinating than handsome, as I remember her," he answered with just a perceptible stiffening of his thin, brown soldier-face.

"I mean, what do you think about the portrait reminding one of her?"

"There is something like in the expression of the mouth — or the shape of the eyes."

"Or both," added Mrs. Forestier, "and I suppose it's not so very remarkable, since there are a few drops of the same blood in Terry's veins. I hadn't realized the resemblance, till the other day, though I sometimes said to myself: 'Who *is* that portrait like?' But then I don't suppose I'd thought twice of Terry Ricardo in five years till a week ago — since you and Milly ran over to Paris."

"What made you think of her then?" asked Lady Hereward, turning her favourite ring on her finger.

"Why, she's in England — arrived yesterday, and has come to visit the Norman Ricardos. Maud Ricardo

was here about a week ago, and told me they were expecting their cousin Terry."

"Oh!" said Lady Hereward.

Sir Ian said nothing.

Mrs. Forestier flashed one of her bright glances from the wife to the husband.

"Luncheon is served, madam," announced the old butler.

CHAPTER II

THEY went into the dining-room, and the table conversation strayed from one thing to another, beginning with the Herewards' short visit abroad whence they had just returned. Paris, according to Millicent Hereward, was looking quite lovely, and had been very amusing. They had gone about a good deal, and she had brought back some pretty things. Next week they were going to spend in town, and she would wear them all. She liked London in June, but she liked the country better, especially when she had been out of England and had just come back. A week in town was long enough for her, at one time. They would go up again later, for another week, perhaps. "I'm not so sure you don't look a tiny bit tired, after your Paris dissipations," said Mrs. Forestier.

Lady Hereward smiled, though in reality she was vexed. At forty-two to look tired was to look old. "If I do, it's nothing," she replied. "I always feel excited in Paris, I hardly know why; as if things would happen. I don't sleep well there, though I always enjoy it so much; and when I do sleep I have the most horrid dreams. I don't suppose in the fortnight we were in Paris, I had forty-eight hours' sleep. And now

the heat's oppressive, isn't it? A brooding, ominous sort of feeling in the air. I shall be quite right again, when I've had a little good sleep, and the weather changes."

"Of course you will, better than ever," said Mrs. Forestier, who was never uncomplimentary or uncomfortable for long. "As for me I adore this sort of weather. It doesn't feel ominous to *me*. The world's looking so divine. I love my bit of it."

"So do I, mine," Lady Hereward hastened to reply. "It was good to come to dear old Friars' Moat again, wasn't it, Ian?"

"Yes," he said, smiling pleasantly at her, if a little absent-mindedly.

Mrs. Forestier wondered if she knew what he was really thinking about. It was difficult to be sure whether Sir Ian was romantically inclined or not, and yet — he had a romantic profile, she told herself; the kind of profile and the kind of romance that one associated with knights of old, and King Arthur's Round Table and all that. The gravity of his expression when not actually smiling was very marked, but suitable to a soldier who had gone through experiences which sober and age a man before his time. Sir Ian's eyes looked rather wistful, too, if you met them unexpectedly, catching his soul unprepared for attack, as it were; but very likely this did not mean anything as exciting as it appeared to mean. He was a happy

and fortunate man, with a charming and devoted wife whom he must have married for love, since she had no money, and he had not been poor; a man who thoroughly enjoyed the country life to which he had settled down after inheriting his uncle's title and place, a few years ago.

"We walked through the woods, and we're going to walk home," went on Millicent Hereward.

"Oh!" said Nina Forestier. "Well, if you're planning to do that, perhaps I ought to tell you something I'm supposed not to tell. I've set my heart on keeping you as long as I can, and showing you the rose-garden. It's quite a dream now, yet if you want to walk home — how long does it take you from here to Friars' Moat?"

"One could do it in forty minutes," said Sir Ian.

"But one doesn't if one is with one's wife, and wanting to enjoy oneself," Millicent finished for him. "One does it in an hour. What is it you ought to tell me and are supposed not to tell?"

"Why — Maud Ricardo mentioned that she was going to take Terry over to pay you a surprise call about half-past four, the day after you came back from Paris. I think she rather wanted Terry to burst upon you; and yet, she'd hate to miss you, of course. I certainly shan't let you leave me till long after three, and if you don't want to miss them, won't you change your mind, and let me send you over in my motor,

just in time to arrive by a quarter-past four? You can motor in ten or fifteen minutes."

"No, thank you very much, I can't give up the walk," said Millicent, slowly and rather thoughtfully. "I think we must start early and take plenty of time."

"I'm almost sorry I told you about Maud and Terry Ricardo," said Mrs. Forestier. "But as Maud mentioned her idea to me, she might think it spiteful if I were the one to make you miss her and her cousin."

"If the call was to be a surprise, she couldn't have blamed us for being out," said Sir Ian. He was a very hospitable man, yet he spoke as if he would not be sorry for an excuse to miss the visitors.

"She would blame us, though," said Millicent, "for she would ask where we were; and when she heard we'd been lunching here, she'd be sure to think Nina had told us, and that we'd stopped out late simply because we didn't care about seeing them."

"Who would tell her?" asked Sir Ian. "Not one of the footmen."

"She would very likely ask to see Miss Verney."

"By the way, Miss Verney didn't once come over here while you were gone," said Mrs. Forestier, "though I begged her to drop in any day, or every day, to tea, thinking she might be lonely."

"Nora isn't the sort of girl to be lonely, while she has the run of the library," remarked Sir Ian. "Still, I wonder she didn't come over."

"She is sulking," said Lady Hereward.

"Isn't that rather an unkind thing to say?" asked Sir Ian.

"Not at all," Millicent answered somewhat sharply. "Nora doesn't care who knows. Indeed, I think she likes people to know that she's furious with me."

"Why, I thought she adored you — as everybody does — and even a little more," exclaimed Mrs. Forestier. "I'm sure she ought to. You've been an angel to her — and so has Sir Ian."

Sir Ian smiled at the suggestion, as concerned himself: "One would have to be decidedly fiendish not to be good to Nora."

"Oh, of course she's clever and pretty, and all that," admitted Mrs. Forestier, "but the fact remains that you and Milly came forward when she was left without a penny in the world, and nobody else was inclined to bother much about her, though she had crowds of relatives."

"Her relatives are all poor," said Lady Hereward. "We were glad to do what we could for her."

"And we've been well paid for what we have done," said Sir Ian. "Milly took her, it's true, not because she particularly felt the need of having a companion, but because she was heartily sorry for the poor child when the vicar died, leaving nothing. However, now that Nora has been nearly six months in the house, I'm sure Milly would hardly know what to do without

her. She's made herself useful — almost indispensable in a thousand ways, little and big; and not only is she pretty and clever, as you say, but she is good. A most unusual girl."

"I should like to have you as my champion, if I needed one," laughed Nina Forestier.

"Nora *doesn't* need a champion, though," protested Lady Hereward. "Nobody is oppressing her. Nobody is unjust to her. On the contrary, everybody is very good and considerate. I am just as fond of her as ever, though I am hurt, and think I have a right to be hurt, because she has entirely changed to me in the last two months. It isn't my fault that she fell in love with the one most undesirable man in the world — *her* world, anyhow; and he being what he is, it isn't my fault that my very love for the girl prevented me from handing her over to him with my blessing."

"Milly is quite right, isn't she, Sir Ian?" said Mrs. Forestier, soothingly, seeing, or fancying she saw, that tears were not far from her friend's eyes.

"Quite right," responded Sir Ian, smiling at his wife. "She usually is right. By the way, she has brought back a present for all her pets in the village, from old bodies in their second childhood, to young bodies just beginning their first."

"She would!" exclaimed Nina Forestier, aware that the subject was changed. "How they all worship her! But then, as I said, everybody does."

"Not everybody," answered Lady Hereward, looking out of the window with a far-away look, which went past the green lawn and the flower border blazing in the sun.

"She has brought a present for you, too," Sir Ian went on.

"Only a quaint old seal I picked up at an antique shop," said his wife. "It's nothing."

Mrs. Forestier protested that it was sure to be lovely, and even if it weren't, in itself, it would be lovely to her as a proof — unneeded, really — that Millicent never forgot her friends.

After that, they talked about some of those friends, great and humble; Mrs. Forestier told of the small happenings of county and village, while the Herewards had been away; and altogether it was a very pleasant luncheon. When it was over Sir Ian left the table with the ladies; they had coffee on the loggia which opened out from Mrs. Forestier's boudoir, and later, gave a few moments to the rose-garden, but only a few, for Lady Hereward insisted that they must not miss the Ricardos. As she and Sir Ian walked away together, with their pleasant air of good comradeship, Nina Forestier, looking after them from the loggia, thought how punctiliously conscientious her friend was. It was not probable that Milly could really be pleased at the idea of seeing Teresina Ricardo, and it would have been easy enough to have missed the

intended "surprise visit" without appearing to have avoided it intentionally. Yet, rather than run the risk of seeming inhospitable to a woman who had not the slightest claim upon her, Milly would cut short her visit to Riding Wood. To be sure, she might have stopped a little longer, and still have reached home in time, if she had accepted the offer of Mrs. Forestier's motor. But, if one could get at her real reason for refusing it, very likely it would turn out to be consideration for the chauffeur, or something else absurdly unselfish, rather than her own desire for a second walk through the woods.

"However," thought Mrs. Forestier, as she saw the two tall, erect figures disappear over the brow of the slight hill which separated them from the long stretch of wood, "however, Milly is so desperately in love with Sir Ian after all these thirteen years of being his wife, that I believe she actually enjoys a tête-à-tête with him better than anything else. He's perfectly delightful to her, too, and they're the greatest friends. Yet I wonder if he's as much in love with her as she is with him, or ——"

She did not finish the sentence in her mind, but let it break off vaguely as she lost sight of Sir Ian and Lady Hereward, walking companionably together, shoulder to shoulder.

CHAPTER III

THE stable clock at Friars' Moat had just struck the quarter after four, as a slender woman, dressed in white, walked up the avenue toward the house. She was alone, and walked slowly, glancing about her with interest, as if she wanted to impress every feature of the place upon her mind. Five minutes after the striking of the clock, she arrived at the door, but even then she did not ring at once. She looked at the old, old stone house, and down at the water-lily leaves in the moat which still ran along one side, though elsewhere it had been filled up generations ago.

An electric bell seemed singularly unsuited to the heavy oak door, hinged and studded with iron, but it was there, though a mere inconspicuous button, and the visitor touched it after a moment's hesitation.

A young footman in a quiet livery answered her ring, and she asked for Lady Hereward.

"Her ladyship went out to lunch, with Sir Ian, and has not come back yet," said the servant. He had never seen the face of the caller before, but it was interesting and striking. It was the face of a woman whom most people would like to know, and the footman thought her a personage, though she had come on foot

and was simply dressed in a short white cotton frock, with a garden hat trimmed only with a drooping wreath of ivy leaves. He had a dim idea that it might be a grievous offence in the eyes of his mistress, if he let this stranger go, without making an effort to detain her; yet on the other hand, Lady Hereward had given no instructions concerning expected visitors. Usually, when she went out, if she wished to see any one who might arrive before she came back, she mentioned the hour of her return, and directed the servants to ask possible callers to wait. She had said nothing of the sort to-day, nevertheless the footman qualified his announcement of her absence. "I believe they intended to come back to tea," he ventured. "They may be here any minute, now."

"Thank you, but I think I had better not wait," the lady answered, in one of the most beautiful voices the young man had ever heard; a voice which, if she sang, would be a creamy contralto, honey-sweet. "Please give these cards to her ladyship, but say that Mrs. Ricardo had a headache, and sent Miss Ricardo alone, lest Lady Hereward heard they meant to come, and had possibly given up some engagement."

This seemed an almost unnecessarily detailed explanation, but the lady gave it with a certain explicit earnestness which showed that she really wanted it repeated precisely as made. The footman resolved to obey strictly, for this visitor of his mistress was one

of those women whom men, in all ranks of life, instinctively long to please.

The servant knew Mrs. Ricardo by name and sight, though she did not come often to Friars' Moat, but he had never heard of a Miss Ricardo. She certainly could not be a daughter who had been away for a long time — as long as his service with the Herewards; for she must be at least twenty-six or seven, and Mrs. Ricardo was not more than thirty-five. His curiosity was aroused, and he wondered almost painfully who the lady in the white dress and the garden hat could possibly be.

He had never seen such eyes as hers, although his ideal of fine eyes had been turquoise blue ones until this minute, and these eyes were gray, even a greenish gray, when you looked straight into them, though the thick dark lashes on upper and lower lids made them seem dark as shadowed trout-pools. Oh, yes, they were eyes that *were* eyes! Apart from them, there was perhaps nothing very extraordinary about the dusky-pale oval of the face, yet Richard, the second footman, could fancy himself doing anything for a woman like this. Up to a few minutes ago, he had imagined that he was hopelessly in love with Lady Hereward's companion, Miss Verney, but now he had suddenly recovered from that passion. He could not bear to let Miss Ricardo go.

"Would you like to see Miss Verney, madam?"

he asked in desperation, even as he mechanically tendered a little silver tray for visiting-cards.

"Miss Verney?" the lady repeated after him.

"Yes, madam; her ladyship's companion, a daughter of the late vicar at Havershall, a neighbouring village. I thought perhaps ——"

"No, thank you, I won't trouble Miss Verney, if you will kindly remember to give my message."

What a voice! Richard hoped that he might have the artistic pleasure of hearing it again. As he was assuring the speaker that her message should by no means be forgotten, he caught sight of Sir Ian coming toward the house, across the lawn. One came in that direction, if one had taken the short cut to Friars' Moat from Riding Wood. Already Sir Ian had seen the lady's face, as she turned from the door to go away, and seeing it, Richard the footman fancied that he paused. Perhaps it was only fancy, though, for after half a second's apparent hesitation, he quickened his steps. The servant thought that he had never seen his master look so soldierly, as he walked briskly forward, head up, shoulders squared.

This settled it, of course. The visitor would not go now. She would have to wait and speak with Sir Ian, who evidently recognized her, and probably she would have to wait now until Lady Hereward's return. No doubt that would be soon. It was even a little surprising that she should not be with Sir Ian, but

very likely she had gone to the village of Riding St. Mary, to see some of her pensioners.

Just as the footman expected, Miss Ricardo stopped, at sight of Sir Ian, and waited for him to join her. Richard hovered a minute or two at the door, expecting his master to bring the visitor inside, but presently he saw that which convinced him it would be more discreet to retire.

Exactly what convinced him, he could hardly have explained, for really nothing happened which would not happen between any lady and gentleman who met after an absence of some time. Perhaps it was the way they looked at one another, which banished the servant almost against his will; yet it could hardly have been that, either, for they did not smile, or appear to be particularly pleased to see each other. Indeed, they were somewhat stiff in their manner; and their voices as they spoke, though quite polite, sounded strained. Nevertheless, the fact remained that Richard the footman felt impelled to efface himself.

It was the lady who spoke first, and held out her hand, saying in her sweet voice which quivered just perceptibly: "How do you do, Sir Ian? I wonder if I've changed so much that you don't remember me?"

"You have changed scarcely at all," he answered; and certainly there was no ring of gladness in his tone. Possibly it hid feeling, rather than expressed it.

They shook hands, and looked in each other's faces,

as if half-afraid of what they might see there. Yet there was nothing that either need have feared. No colour showed through the ineradicable South African tan which had permanently bronzed the soldier's face; and the bright rose which stained the cheeks of the young woman made her look far prettier and more youthful than she had done five minutes before. She now appeared to be no more than twenty-five.

For an instant she forgot to draw her hand from Sir Ian's and naturally he could not let it drop, so he held it firmly in his, till it occurred to her that it would be well for her to take it away. She blushed deeply as she did so, though not in offence; otherwise her gray eyes would not have been so kind, so gentle, as they rested on the man's brown face, and seemed to count the silver threads on his temples.

"You have changed," she said, "but only as I have liked to think you would change, with the years. The South African War ——"

"Yes, that changed all of us," he caught her up.

"It gave you glory."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, then reddened a little. "I beg your pardon," he went on, "but glory is a very big word, and I did no more than almost any other man did. I had some luck, that's all."

"I'm very, very glad that you had luck, and that you were spared to enjoy it," said Miss Ricardo. "It is — pleasant to see you again."

"Thank you," he answered. But he did not return the compliment. A look of hopeless weariness and illness sharpened his face. His shoulders were not squared now. His head drooped. If a man as sunburnt as Sir Ian could turn pale, he was pale.

Perhaps his abruptness pained her. At all events she moved as if to go. "I'd just left Maud's card and mine for — Milly" (she brought the name out with a slight effort), "when I saw you. I wouldn't have come, as Maud had a headache, but she was sure Mrs. Forestier would have told Milly that she meant to bring me over to-day; and we both thought ——"

"Mrs. Forestier did tell us, but only when we were lunching there just now," Sir Ian said quickly, as she paused.

"I was sure you knew, the moment I saw you, for you didn't look a bit surprised."

"I'd got over my surprise."

"Maud thought it would be rather horrid for neither of us to come, if Milly had heard. She might ——"

"She did say at once, that we would come home early, not to miss you and Mrs. Ricardo. She — we started soon after three, but — we parted in the woods, and I — came on ahead. I should think — she won't be long."

"Then — shall I wait? Would you like me to wait?"

"Yes. Yes, I would like it," he said. There was

no doubt of his pained embarrassment now. It was plain that he was very deeply moved, even, it would seem, in almost unbearable distress. Miss Ricardo saw it only too clearly, and thought that she knew the cause. She grew pale.

"Ian, don't be unhappy," she said suddenly, in a very frank, sweet tone. "Please don't. Believe me, there's no reason why you should. Everything's over and forgotten, and I should like to be your friend. Why, do you think if I'd had any stupid feelings, I should come to visit my cousin Norman's wife, so near this — place? I knew I should be close to you and Milly, for I'd heard all about Friars' Moat, of course, from Maud, when you came in for your uncle's title; and I knew you had been living here for about seven years. I *had* to come to England, you see — but maybe you don't see; for perhaps nobody's told you of my brother-in-law's marriage? And the children need me no longer —— Well, there was no home for me in India — no home I wanted — and I felt I should like to see dear England again, even if I should find myself a little 'out' of things after so many years. Maud asked me to visit her, and I didn't care to refuse. I thought — I thought I should *like* to meet you and Milly. Can't you understand, and let us be friends, as if there had never been any foolishness?"

"Foolishness!" echoed Sir Ian. "Oh, God — Terry!"

"Don't!" exclaimed the woman. "It's all so far in the past, when I was a child, almost; and if I ever thought there was anything to forgive, I forgave it long ago."

"If I could only tell you!" he groaned. "But I can't, I'm bound ——"

"Hush, don't try to tell me anything," she said hurriedly. "I wouldn't have come if I hadn't forgotten everything but our friendship, and my friendship with Milly, who used to be so good — so very good to me when I was a child — and she no more than a girl. I don't want to be reminded of anything except happy memories, and though you have made me rather foolish and tearful — oh, without meaning to, I know! — I do think it would be better if I stayed now, and waited for your wife to come home. I — I made up my mind to pay this visit, you know, though — it wasn't quite easy; and Maud never heard — anything disagreeable, I hope, so you see —— Yes, I am almost sure I had better stay, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am sure. Stay!" answered Sir Ian. "Shall we go into the house?"

There was agony in his eyes and voice, but Teresina Ricardo would not seem to hear. She had known that the first meeting would be difficult, though she had not expected him to show such remorse as this. She had thought often that perhaps he felt none. With her heart beating so hard that she was half afraid he

might hear it, she talked about the beauty of the old house, and of the whole place and the country round. She had walked from Maud's, she said. She had wanted to walk, and Maud directed her so well that it would have been impossible to lose the way. "Only a mile and a half, and straight along, after the first turn. How lovely the Surrey lanes are! I didn't come out into the blazing sunlight once, till I'd got within six yards of your lodge, then into your shady avenue. I don't look very hot, do I?"

"You look just as you used to look when we rode together ——" he began, but she stopped him, laughing.

"Now! — It's my turn to cry 'nonsense,' and I won't beg your pardon, as you did mine. I was eighteen then — if there ever *was* such a time, which seems impossible — and now I'm thirty-one, looking every day of my age. Yes, of course we'll go into the house where I'm sure it's beautifully cool, and wait for Milly. Did you say you thought she wouldn't be long?"

"I suppose she will come home — soon," Sir Ian replied heavily.

"Maud says she's as devoted to good works as ever."

"Oh, yes, very devoted."

"She was always the most unselfish mortal."

"I — yes."

"I don't wonder a bit, you know, Sir Ian, that you

fell in love with her. Don't answer, please! There's nothing to say. I wanted to tell you that. I've felt so about it — almost from the first."

"Oh, God!" he said again, half under his breath.

They had moved away from the front door, as they talked, but now Miss Ricardo hastily walked through a long open window, which led into a room unmistakably a drawing-room. "May we go in here?" she threw over her shoulder, brightly, as if she had not heard the stifled cry of the man's soul.

He followed, without speaking, but the look on his stricken face made her ask by way of changing the subject: "Who is Miss Verney? I don't remember Maud's writing about her; but then Maud writes so seldom, and only puts into her letters what she thinks the most important things. Is Miss Verney important? Your footman wanted to call her down to see me, but I wouldn't let him."

"Yes, Miss Verney is important, in this house, anyhow," Sir Ian answered.

"Shall I see her?"

"You mean you want her to come in?"

"Why not? Yes, I should like to see her, if she's a nice girl."

"She is a very nice girl — though not very cheerful just now. She's had a lot of trouble." Sir Ian spoke as if he had been wound up to speak, like an automaton. And like an automaton he went to the bell and rang it.

"Say to Miss Verney that I should be glad if she would come down and meet an old friend of mine, who has called," he said, when Richard the footman appeared.

"By George, catch me sending for any one, even if it was Miss Verney, if I was alone with a lady like that," thought the young man, as he went dutifully off upon his errand. But presently he came back, full of apologies.

"If you please, Sir Ian, I can't find Miss Verney anywheres," he said. "I made sure she was in her own sitting-room, ever since I took her up her lunch there, but she must have slipped out. I looked in the summer-house, too, Sir Ian, where she goes sometimes of an afternoon, but she isn't there, nor in the arbour by the pond. She must have gone for a walk, I'm afraid."

"Never mind. When she returns, you can give her the message."

"Yes, Sir Ian. And would you like me to serve tea, sir, or wait till her ladyship's return?"

Sir Ian hesitated, as if in doubt what to say, and before he had made up his mind, a girl who had been about to pass the window, turned, and looked from the lawn into the drawing-room.

"Oh, come in, Nora," called Sir Ian. "I have just sent and asked for you."

The girl obeyed, but with visible reluctance. She

was a very pretty girl, dressed in half-mourning, and the white-dotted black muslin she wore gave great value to her almost startlingly fair skin, turquoise eyes, and bright auburn hair. But the eyes were clouded, and the fair skin blurred with crying. Her long white throat was uncovered, and a pulse beat in it. Her hand, with which she was nervously grasping the back of a chair near the window, was trembling. It was painful to the stranger to see the girl's embarrassment at being caught like this, on her way into the house; but she could not seem to notice her pitiful state.

Sir Ian, absorbed in his own thoughts, did not appear to see that Miss Verney was in trouble.

"Richard has been searching the house for you, and your favourite haunts out of doors," he said. "Have you been taking a walk?"

"Yes, I — have been taking a walk," she answered. "I thought, if I came back in time for tea ——"

"Of course. Why shouldn't you take walks?" Sir Ian broke in kindly. "I have been telling Miss Ricardo about you. Miss Ricardo is—an old friend of ours, and a cousin of Mrs. Ricardo, whom you know. She has just come back from India."

The visitor put out her hand to the girl, who was looking deadly white, as if she might faint, and the slim, childish hand which responded to hers, was cold. Miss Verney did not speak, and Miss Ricardo was

sure it was because she could not. She wished she were able to think of some pretext to fling the girl, some excuse to leave the room.

"Yes, I'm just back from India," she said. "But I feel the weather very oppressive. How much more, then, you must feel it, who aren't accustomed to a Turkish-bath climate. I'm sure you must be tired after your walk, at the hottest part of the day."

"I am tired." The girl snatched eagerly at the straw held out to her. "I——"

"Were you in the woods?" asked Sir Ian, as if he were saying the first thing that came into his head. It was necessary to say something.

The question seemed for some reason to add to Miss Verney's embarrassment. "No — yes. I — was in the woods — for a while," she stammered.

"I didn't see you there," said Sir Ian. "Did you meet ——" he paused for an instant, and the girl grew red and white. "Did you meet — my wife?"

"No," she said so faintly that at last Sir Ian's eyes were opened. "You are tired!" he exclaimed. "You've walked too far. I think we had better have tea without — waiting."

Miss Verney rang the bell, which gave her a chance to turn her back to Miss Ricardo and Sir Ian for a few seconds. When the footman appeared she asked for tea, as Sir Ian evidently expected her to do, and then said she would go and take off her hat. She was

so warm that her head ached. (So warm, though her hands might have been in an iced bath!) In five minutes she would come down again. And she slipped away, as if in fear of being detained.

More than five minutes passed before she returned, but she appeared just in time to pour tea, and it was plain that she had spent the time of her absence in trying to wash the tear stains from her face. She had succeeded indifferently, but was more composed, and Terry Ricardo found Miss Verney's efforts at entertaining the guest very pathetic.

There were a great many nice things to eat; several kinds of tiny sandwiches, hot buttered muffins, little iced cakes, and strawberries, but nobody could eat, and seldom had there been less interesting talk between three intelligent people. As soon as she dared, Miss Ricardo rose.

"I'm afraid I must go," she said. "Maud will be wanting me. Milly has been detained, evidently; and if she is doing something for somebody, there's no telling when she may be back. You must say to her that I waited as long as I could; and give her Maud's love. Of course, we both hope that she'll soon come to White Fields."

This time Sir Ian did not urge Miss Ricardo to stay.

"I'll go with you as far as the lodge," he said.

They had not much to say to each other, as they walked together, and Terry kept her eyes on the

ground. She could not look up and risk seeing again the agony she had seen in the man's eyes, for she felt that it was there, still; such agony as a man's eyes might betray, if he were enduring in grim silence the torture of the rack. She could not look until the instant of parting came, and then she said good-bye hurriedly, almost running away from him, lest he should suggest going farther.

Not once did she glance back, but if she had, she would not have found him gazing after her. He stood still as if stricken, for a few seconds, and then he turned hastily. Not, however, to go into the house. He struck off toward the short cut which would land him again into Riding Wood.

CHAPTER IV

It was what Mrs. Barnard, of Riding Wood Farm, called her lazy afternoon. Tired after her day's work, which began at five, she loved Saturday afternoon, which she devoted — from three o'clock till six — more or less to her week's mending. "More or less" because there was tea to get, and other little things invariably turned up to be done. Besides, those among Mrs. Barnard's friends who could take their freedom on Saturday afternoons, often dropped in for a gossip then, or to ask advice from the farmer's wife, a wise and large-hearted woman whose ruddy apple face beamed with kindness for all the world. "It's easy to be kind to folks, when you're happy yourself," she said; and Mrs. Barnard was happy. She loved her home and her work and her friends. She thought her silent, reserved husband, who had been a soldier, the best man living, and adored her one child, Margaret, known to those whom it concerned as Poppet.

While Mrs. Barnard mended the socks of Thomas, her husband and Poppet, her daughter, the little girl sat in a low chair beside her mother in what they called "the arbour," sewing doll's clothes. The arbour was a kind of rough, rustic pergola, which Tom Barnard

had made the year of his marriage — the year in which, at the suggestion of his late Colonel, Sir Ian Hereward, Mr. Forestier had taken Barnard on as a farmer in the home farm of Riding Wood. That same year Tom and Rose, his wife, had planted grape-vines and honeysuckle and clematis to climb over the arbour, and all had flourished as if they were glad to encourage the young couple. Now, the happiness and the creepers were seven years old together; the creepers gave a deep green shade to the arbour, and the happiness gave sunshine to the whole farm.

Poppet was a year younger than the arbour, and it was her favourite seat, as well as her mother's. The farmhouse standing on a hill, and the embowered pergola leading out from the front door, those sitting on the sheltered rustic seats could see wagons stop or pass at the gate. They could also see any one coming up the path; and for a view they could look across a dip up to deep masses of forest. Over the tops of trees rose the crown of a stone tower, built by the late Mr. Forestier's father as a viewpoint. From the balcony of the tower, reached by a winding stairway which ran outside, several counties could be seen, and an ocean of waving blue, with a silver glitter on the horizon that meant the sea: a famous view; but Mrs. Barnard much preferred her own homelike outlook from the arbour. In the early days of her marriage, any one was allowed to go up into the tower; but tramps

had taken advantage of its shelter, and Mr. Forestier had ordered it to be locked up. Only his widow, the Herewards, and the tenants of Riding Wood Farm had keys, so far as Rose knew. The Herewards because they were intimate friends as well as neighbours, and loved the view, and the Barnards because it was one of Tom's duties to look into the tower rooms now and then, and see that the place was kept in repair. Before Poppet was born, Rose used to go up with him by moonlight sometimes, and hand in hand they would look out over the blue and silver world, telling each other that they were the happiest couple in it, as romantically as if they had been poets, instead of farmers. But now, Mrs. Barnard, though just as happy and loving, took life a little more prosaically. That was why she preferred her own arbour and her own view, and never went to the tower by moonlight or any other light.

"Mummy, here comes Craigie," chirped Poppet, looking up from her doll's blouse, and down through the pergola toward the gate.

"Does she? But you mustn't say Craigie. You must say Miss Craigie, or Miss Kate," the child's mother corrected her, as she transferred a pile of socks and stockings from her lap to the seat, preparatory to greeting the visitor.

"Why?" Poppet wanted to know, looking up with large, grave, brown eyes like her father's. "Every-

body at the Moat calls her Craigie — except Edward, the footman, who's in love with her."

"Dear me, dear me, what large ears little pitchers have, to be sure," mumbled Rose Barnard, pressing her pink lips together to keep from smiling. "It's *quite* different at the Moat. There Kate is a servant. Here she is a friend." And as by this time the subject of the conversation had come well into view, Mrs. Barnard jumped up, holding out her hand.

"This is nice, Kate," said she. "All the more welcome from being a surprise."

"I just *had* to come and see you," exclaimed the young woman whom Poppet must not call "Craigie." "I haven't got long to stop, though. I expect that her ladyship will be home by half-past four or so. She and Sir Ian are lunching over at the Wood, with Mrs. Forestier, and I'd have slipped away before if I could, but I got into a fuss with Edward."

"Poor Edward! I shouldn't wonder if it was more your fault than his, Kate," laughed Mrs. Barnard. "I expect he was jealous, thinking how you've been away in Paris, perhaps flirting with some smart couriers in the hotel."

"It's none of his business if I flirt or not," said Kate Craigie. "I never promised myself to him."

"That's what makes him so wild," remarked Rose. "He'd be quiet enough if you would." And she smiled at Kate, who was a handsome, well-made girl,

with refined features, and the look which causes a young woman of her class to be called "very superior."

"That's partly it," Kate admitted. "But I can't make up my mind. Edward is awfully good looking, and I can't help liking him, but there's another thing I can't help, too. I can't help thinking it's silly to like him, and that he ain't the sort of match for me now. I could do a lot better, if I liked, and I tell him so frankly. Why, he'd never have dared to pop the question to Liane, and he wouldn't to me, if I'd come to the house as her ladyship's maid. He'd have felt the difference between us then just as he would with Liane, even if he'd happened to have fancied her, which of course he never *did*. It's just because I was parlour-maid when we first got to know each other that makes him feel himself on an equality."

"Well, there's something I can't help thinking," said Mrs. Barnard. "And that is that all such talk about equality, and this or that one being above or below, is nonsense with folk in our station of life. What does it matter if a girl's a parlour-maid or a lady's maid, or whether a man's a valet or a footman? They're servants, and just on the same level in the eyes of those that's above us all, just as I suppose the whole world's on a level to Royalties."

"I don't know about Royalties, but Edward's got to imagining that her ladyship's heard what he wants of me, and is putting me up to the idea that it ain't

suitable to my position. That was what he was fussing about to-day. He thinks that she set me against him, while we were in Paris."

"As if her ladyship would!" exclaimed Rose in good-natured scorn.

Kate flushed. "Oh, I suppose you don't believe she takes the same interest in me as she did in Liane."

"If she hadn't liked you, and thought well of you, she wouldn't have taken you from parlour-maid and trained you to be her own maid, instead of getting another French woman after poor little Liane disappeared so mysteriously," Rose consoled her.

"She must have liked me, and I'm sure I do my best to please her," sighed Kate. "But I could scream, sometimes, the way she says 'Liane used to do this, or that.' Why if Edward's jealous of other men with me, I'm sure I suffer just as much as he does, or more. It's my nature to be jealous. I can't help it. I want to be all in all to any one I'm with. And I'm jealous of Liane. Sometimes I feel just mad with jealousy. I could stop doing her ladyship's hair, and box her ears, when she says in that quiet voice of hers, 'Craigie, you haven't Liane's touch.'"

"Good gracious, Kate, I hope you don't burst out like that to any one but me!" gasped Mrs. Barnard, horrified at this *lèse majesté*. "Any one would think you hated her ladyship, she who's so kind to every one."

"Sometimes I *do* hate her; sometimes I'd lie down

and die for her, just according as she treats me," Kate persisted obstinately. "Her cold ways make me feel all on fire, often. Perhaps Edward feels like that about me. I hope he *does*. I like some one else to suffer. And *he* hates her ladyship, sure enough, because he's sure it's her fault I'm off with him, since she took me on as maid in Liane's place."

"Poor Liane!" murmured Mrs. Barnard. "I wonder if we'll ever know what's become of her."

"Her ladyship suspects," said Kate.

"*Does she?*" The wise woman's curiosity overcame prudence for a moment.

"She thinks — I would ask you never to tell, only I know you never do tell things. She thinks that Mr. Barr had something to do with Liane's disappearance."

"My heavens, Mr. Barr! And he's in love with Miss Verney, as every one knows!"

"Men are strange. You can't tell what they'll do."

"Silly! Yes you can — Mr. Barr doesn't seem like that. What put such an idea in her ladyship's head?"

"I don't know what put it into her head, though they do say that Liane used to be seen walking down to the steward's house, after twilight, more than once before she cleared out, nine or ten weeks ago. Her ladyship may have heard that, or she may have heard more, for all I can tell. But what I *do* know is, that the idea is in her head, and very strong, too. I've

known it for some time, and for the best of reasons; because I've heard her say so to Sir Ian. Oh, I don't eavesdrop. I'm not a Frenchwoman, and I have no sly tricks! But I happened to come in and catch a bit of what they were saying, in the midst of a tremendous talk. They shut up in an instant, and her ladyship never dreamed I'd heard. I never spoke of it to any one before, but I felt I'd got the clue to all that's been going on underneath the surface, up at the Moat, for weeks past."

"You mean ——"

"I mean I'm sure her ladyship tried to persuade Sir Ian to discharge Mr. Ian Barr. She could never bear the sight of him, anyhow, and if she'd had her way, Sir Ian wouldn't have taken him on as steward."

"But that was what every one thought so noble of Sir Ian! The young fellow was his uncle's son, and if the old gentleman hadn't quarrelled with him, would probably have left him a lot of money."

"What was the story exactly? I know it only in a mixed-up way."

"Why, old Sir Ian, the uncle of the present one, was wild, and, many say, wicked as a young man. Any how, he was an avowed atheist — a dreadful thing. He lived abroad in his youth, and Friars' Moat was shut up. In Italy or somewhere he married an opera singer, they say, who was as bad as himself. So they separated; then he came back to his own country, and she

was supposed to have died — killed in an earthquake, which destroyed some Italian towns. He was visiting a friend in Ireland at that time, and in his wild way fell in love with a wonderfully beautiful peasant girl. They were married, and he brought her to Friars' Moat, where the county refused to call — he was disliked, anyhow, for his lawlessness and his atheism and his awful temper. Soon he tired of his wife, and when little Ian was a baby it was discovered that his Italian wife was alive after all — a cruel thing for the poor Irish girl! She reproached her husband something dreadful, they say — for the baby's sake — and he was so furious that he refused to give her more money than an Irish peasant could live upon. Hoping that he'd do something for the child, the unhappy creature took a tiny cottage near by, and the wicked old man did have the decency to pay for the boy's schooling. When the little chap got old enough to hear the story, though, and of his father's meanness to the beautiful peasant mother, he wouldn't have another penny from him. And one day they met and there was an awful scene, for the boy inherited something of his father's wild temper. The story is that the old man struck him, for his 'impudence,' with a stick he carried; that the boy — only fourteen or so — wrenched it from him and threw it in his face. Of course that ended everything. Old Sir Ian disinherited the boy, to whom he meant to leave a few

thousands. Young Ian wouldn't be called Hereward any more, as he had been. He took the name of Barr, which was in his mother's family, and in one way or another he supported not only himself, but her till the time when *our* Sir Ian came into everything, on his uncle's death — the first wife being really dead by that time, too. Our Sir Ian didn't know the truth till he got here, having been away from England so much. Then, when he found out, he wanted young Ian Barr to accept all the money, for, of course, it was out of his power to do anything about the estate. Young Ian wouldn't have a shilling! But when he got to know his cousin a little he was persuaded to take the stewardship. No doubt it was partly for his mother's sake, so she should have more luxuries; though she died soon after, it would have been foolish as well as ungracious to throw the job over then."

"So that's the story," exclaimed Kate. "It sounds all right for Mr. Barr, but isn't he an atheist too?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so. He isn't a church-goer, that's all. And he never got on with the vicar of Riding Wood, who couldn't understand or make allowances. Lady Hereward being so fond of the vicar, perhaps young Mr. Barr's attitude prejudiced her. And he has a very proud, independent way. I dare say she thought him ungrateful."

"I hear the servants say they never had a civil word

for each other. And she hated him being named Ian — the son of a peasant girl!"

"Anyhow, Sir Ian didn't discharge him. He resigned the place of steward himself."

"Yes. But would he give up such a good berth and a pretty little home where he might have taken Miss Verney, if they'd married, unless there was a *good reason?* Perhaps Sir Ian *advised* him to resign."

"I don't believe he ever made love to Liane."

"I wonder? I shouldn't be surprised if they were secretly married, before he fell in love with Miss Verney, and now he regrets it too late."

"Nonsense! Tom and I always thought him a splendid young fellow. We've been so sorry for him, because of the burden he had to bear, through no fault of his own!"

"Liane was pretty, whatever she was," Kate grudgingly allowed. "Gentlemen used to turn and look after her. She knew that, and liked it. She *was* a vain piece, though her ladyship thought her so perfect."

"To my mind, she couldn't compare with Miss Verney, no, not even if she'd been in the same class of life," said Mrs. Barnard.

"Have you seen Miss Verney, lately?" asked Kate.

"Not for several weeks. She doesn't seem to walk this way any more, and she never drops in to ask about little Poppet here, as she used to do."

"She never goes anywhere, if she can help it, but

just mopes about the house, or takes a short walk in the woods; and she *has* gone off in her looks! She's fallen away, you can't think; and she was slender enough as it was. She's lost colour too, and her colour was her greatest beauty. Richard, the second footman, used to stand and gape at her as if she was a Madonna, but even he said to Edward to-day that she'd changed."

"It's on account of poor Mr. Ian Barr, of course."

"Yes, that's what we all think. It can't be anything else. She is like another girl since he gave up his berth as steward, and went away, goodness knows where — unless *she* does. By the by, I came through the woods, and saw her there, up by the Tower. There was a novel in her hand, but she had an excited look, not as if she'd come to read, and I thought she had the air of being a bit put out at the sight of me. I couldn't help saying to myself, 'I wonder if she expects to meet somebody?'"

"You 'can't help' too many things, it seems to me, my dear," said Rose. "You can't help feeling this and that about poor Edward, who worships the ground you walk on ——"

"Do you advise me to make it up with him, then?"

"Yes, indeed, if you love him. There's nothing that's worth much except love if you're thinking of taking a man. And if it's that you've come to ask me ——"

"Yes, it was. Just to talk it over. Hark! What's that?"

"That shot? Oh, that's nothing. We often hear shots in the woods. Some rabbit ——"

"There it goes again."

"Yes, they got the poor little chap that time, for sure."

"Funny-sounding shots, don't you think?" asked Kate.

"I expect it's just an effect. You do hear them sounding different, sometimes. The keepers are getting rid of the rabbits this year, as fast as they can. They're a terrible pest to Tom, on the farm."

"Well I must be going," Kate announced. "It takes me a while to get home, and one can't walk fast this weather."

"Do stop and have a cup of tea. I was going to make it," said Rose.

"I told Edward if I wasn't in to tea, he could just make up his mind that I'd made up *my* mind to think no more about him."

"Oh, in that case," laughed the farmer's wife, "I won't urge you to stop."

"Her ladyship might be wanting me, anyhow, after she gets in," said Kate.

Mrs. Barnard kissed the young woman good-bye, patting her shoulder, and telling her to mind and be a good girl, not to be jealous of poor Liane with Lady

Hereward, or to make Edward jealous of her. The girl went away cheered by advice and sympathy, and still more by the chance to empty her heart of its grievances. Mrs. Barnard walked down to the gate with her departing visitor, and came back to find Poppet large-eyed and tearful.

"Why, Mummy's darling white mouse, what is the matter?" she wanted to know.

"Rabbits," sniffed the child, swallowing down a sob. "I don't like them to have to shoot the poor bunnies. And perhaps if Miss Verney's in the woods, they'll shoot her, too, by mistake."

"By mistake for a bunny? Not much danger, my pet. You love Miss Verney, don't you?"

"She's the nicest lady in the world," said Poppet.

"Nicer than Lady Hereward?"

"I don't love Lady Hereward."

"What — when she's so kind to you, and brings you such a nice new doll every Christmas?"

"I don't love her because she doesn't love me," said the child. "She doesn't really care about any one — except Sir Ian."

"What a strange white mouse it is!" exclaimed Rose, kissing the child's cheek. "What things it thinks about, that nobody else would dream of."

"'*Tis* so, though," Poppet insisted. "My lady doesn't love any one in the world except Sir Ian. She

does things for other people because she wants to be kind, but she'd kill any one to please Sir Ian."

"My goodness, baby, don't say such dreadful things!" cried her mother. "You frighten me with your weird ideas sometimes — just like a little old woman."

"I see things you don't see, Mummy," said the child, "because it's such a few years since I came down from Heaven that I haven't got tired of noticing."

"There's another queer idea on top of all the rest," gasped Mrs. Barnard. "You'd better come in and watch me make the tea."

CHAPTER V

Rose Barnard and Poppet had finished their tea, and Rose was washing up the dishes, when a cry from the child who had gone to the arbour, startled her so that she dropped a cup.

The farmer's wife was not nervous, or easily startled, but she had never heard a cry like that from the reserved and dreamy little girl. It was a cry of terror such as no child should have to utter; and the responsive jump of her own nerves, with the simultaneous crash of the breaking cup, increased the horror of the shrill sound tenfold. Rose flew from the kitchen through the living-room toward the arbour, and met Poppet running to her.

The mother's first thought was one of thanksgiving that the child was alive and apparently unhurt, for in the few seconds which had followed the cry, unspeakable fears had darted like forked lightning across the confused darkness of her brain. Her imagination had pictured Poppet attacked by a mad bull, or a desperate tramp, perhaps a lunatic.

"My baby — my baby — what is it?" she stammered, to the pale child, giving the little form haven in her arms.

Poppet's scream of terror seemed to have exhausted her powers of expression. She could only gasp and, trembling against her mother's heart, point to the door. Rose put the child behind her, and, throbbing with all the fierce courage of a tigress in defence of her young, went to confront the thing which had drawn that shriek of fear from Poppet.

In the arbour stood Sir Ian Hereward, ashen gray, and aged by ten years since Rose had seen him last. With one hand he grasped a vine-draped support of the arbour, and his weight seemed to hang from it, as if it alone kept him from falling. He was staring straight ahead like a person who walks in his sleep, and sees only the passing of his own dream. There was blood on the hand which clutched the rustic pole, and blood on the hand that crumpled, unconsciously, his red-stained Panama hat. He did not appear to see Mrs. Barnard, until she gasped out, "Good heavens, sir, what's happened?" Then his eyes seemed to come to life, from their dead stare, and found the woman's wholesome face, like a light in darkness.

"Tom — where's Tom?" he asked.

The fancy came to Rose that his voice sounded like a voice from a tomb, and a great pity for the man overwhelmed her. He had been stricken by some appalling blow, she saw. Probably there had been an accident, but no physical hurt which had befallen him could have made the hero of many battles look like a gal-

vanized corpse, and speak with the voice of a lost spirit. He might be wounded — he must be wounded, since blood-stains were on his hands and clothes, but no pain could have changed him as he was changed, this soldier whom her soldier-husband loved.

"Oh, sir, my poor Colonel!" she exclaimed, going back to the old name she had known so well when she had been only Tom's sweetheart. "If only Tom were here to help you. He's gone to London, on business for Mrs. Forestier, but he'll be back — he may be back almost any minute now. Tell me what I can do, till he comes. Tell me what's the matter."

Sir Ian grew more calm, though the sunken eyes in the ashen face looked no less like the eyes of a dead man.

"Send little Poppet away," he said. "I — I'm sorry I frightened her. I didn't mean ——"

"Oh, sir, it's nothing. She's so sensitive. She'll be all right. Run, darling, into the kitchen, and wait there till Mummy comes. Sir Ian's in great trouble. Run; and you may get yourself a ginger-nut out of the stone jar."

"I don't want ginger-nut," whimpered the child. And then, bursting into loud sobbing, she darted away toward the kitchen, like one of the rabbits she loved, released from a trap.

"My wife — dead. Killed." The words came jerkily from lips stiff as if frozen.

"Oh!" gasped Rose. "Her Ladyship! It can't be true. Perhaps she's only fainted. Was it a motor accident?"

"No," said Sir Ian. "I want Tom to go back with me. Back — to the Tower. I think — I'm a little dazed. A doctor must come. And — the police."

Sick and tremulous as she was, the farmer's wife had not lost her wholesome good sense. She saw that, whatever the dreadful thing which had happened her husband's old Colonel was in no fit state to answer questions, and she determined to ask no more.

"If I could leave you here, sir, for a minute," she said trying to speak quietly, "I'd go call Jimmy Russell, and send him on my bicycle like a flash into Riding St. Mary, to fetch Doctor Unwin. Then — then on the way back, he could run out to the Police Station. Tom's got his bicycle with him, and won't be long getting home from the station. The train's due now, but you know it's generally a bit late."

"The doctor and the — police must come to the Tower," said Sir Ian, with the same somnambulist look in his eyes again.

"Yes, Sir Ian; I'll tell Jimmy. You'll stop here till I get back, won't you?"

"I don't know," the dreary voice answered, and the eyes that saw a nightmare turned toward the woods where, far away, the crown of the Tower rose among dark pine trees.

Rose guessed what was in his mind. "No, no, sir," she said firmly. "You mustn't go back there alone, whatever it is. It wouldn't do, on any account, especially if — if it's an affair for the police."

"What does it matter!" he murmured, as though to himself. "I can't leave her there alone — any longer. Go send the man to Riding St. Mary."

Mrs. Barnard went; and when she came back, Sir Ian Hereward had gone.

It was not until she stood in the arbour, gazing down the path toward the open gate, wishing with all her soul for Tom to come, that she remembered the two shots in the woods which Kate Craigie had said "sounded queer."

What if —— But no, such things did not happen in this sweet, quiet country which she loved. Such things could not happen to a great lady, a good lady, like Lady Hereward.

And then she saw Tom stopping his bicycle at the gate.

CHAPTER VI

Up the path came Tom Barnard, wheeling the somewhat old-fashioned bicycle, which he had bought second hand. From behind the saddle dangled two or three little brown paper parcels which he had brought back from London (whither he journeyed very seldom), to give pleasure to Rose and Poppet.

At sight of the familiar and well-loved figure, Mrs. Barnard's self-control suddenly snapped, and she broke into hysterical crying as she ran down the path, holding out both hands like a child, to the one she best loved and trusted.

"Why, little woman!" exclaimed the farmer, alarmed at such an unaccustomed display of emotion. "Nothing wrong with the baby?"

"No — no," and then the story came tumbling from her lips anyhow, in strange confusion, choked with sobs. How Poppet had screamed, and the Colonel was there, covered with blood — no, not covered, but there was a lot. And he could hardly speak, so she dared not ask questions; but he said her ladyship was dead, and he wanted Tom; and Jimmy Russell had gone on her (Rose's) bicycle for the doctor and the police — yes, the police; she wasn't mistaken. And

whatever it was, was up by the Tower. She wanted the Colonel to stop; but he wouldn't, so she supposed ——

Tom waited for no more. Leaving the bicycle with its dangling parcels, against the arbour, without another question or word to his wife, he turned on his heel and ran down the path with great loping strides which would take him up the hill to the Tower at the rate of a mile in eight minutes. It was enough for him that his adored Colonel was in trouble, and was to be found near the Tower: he wanted to know nothing further, for it was dreadful to Tom Barnard that Sir Ian had come in vain to seek his help. If he could have been transported in that instant to the Tower, without having to waste a moment by the way, in getting there, he would have given months of his life, even months of happiness with Rose and the child; for Tom owed the good fortune of years past and present to Sir Ian, and no sacrifice would be sacrifice, if made for him.

On the side of the road opposite the farmhouse gate, was a gate which led to a private path through the woods. There was a notice tacked to a tree near by, stating that trespassers would be prosecuted; but nobody ever had been prosecuted, within the memory of man. The gate was kept locked, but it was easy for a man to vault over it. Sir Ian Hereward had no doubt done so, in coming to the farm with his tragic news, and again on returning to the woods. Tom

Barnard followed his example, for though he had a key which fitted the rusty padlock, it did not even occur to him to stop and get it.

The narrow path was made narrower still by the intrusion of bracken from either side, and was overhung by the branches of low-growing beech and ash trees. A little distance from the road it divided, going to the right toward the cottage of the head keeper, and mounting the hill straight ahead, with few windings toward the Tower. The windless air seemed, to Barnard, to be pressed down by the trees, until it weighed heavy as a pall upon his head. He had looked forward to the refreshment of coming back into the country after the heat and dust of London; and he had come to this! His temples throbbed, and the green light in the silent woods gave no ease to his eyes, which saw red, as if they peeped through a network of bloodshot veins. The crackling of tiny branches and last year's pine-cones under his feet only emphasized the stillness and made it terrible to him for the first time in his recollection. It was as if the woods whispered of the secret that he was on his way to find out, a secret of horror, which it seemed unnatural that such a fairy place should harbour.

Barnard did not consciously think these thoughts, yet they beat in his brain, and it was the hammering of them against his temples which made his head throb as if it might burst.

Fast as he walked, crashing through all obstacles such as flowering bushes and boughs of young trees, the time he took in gaining the top of the hill was almost interminable to him. But at last he reached the plateau where, seen down a green vista between two evenly planted avenues of pines, rose the stone tower. Beyond there was a drop, which gave to the hill an effect of great height, as if it stood like a great ship in the midst of the billowy blue sea which meant the rising and falling land of three counties. As Barnard entered the avenue of trees, a figure moved at the far end, showing black for an instant against the faint violet drop-curtain of mingling sky and landscape. Others might not have recognized it at that distance, but Tom did. It was the form of Sir Ian Hereward; and Tom called encouragingly, "I'm coming, sir!" Then he started to run faster, breathing hard; and the sweat that came out on his forehead felt cold, not hot, as he ran, though the air was dead even on the height.

Sir Ian came to meet him, with long steps, and though he was very pale, with set jaws, the curious nightmare-dread of what he might have to find at the Tower suddenly became less acute for Barnard as he saw his old Colonel's face.

"I wanted you, Tom," said Sir Ian. "You were the only man I ——" he could not finish.

"I'm here, sir," answered Barnard. "I came the instant I got home."

"Yes. I knew you would. Your wife told you what ——"

"As well as she could, sir. Something has happened to her ladyship ——"

"She is dead. I came to look for her, and I found — this."

He turned, facing toward the Tower as if by an effort, and walking with his head down. Tom followed, catching up with him, and keeping by his side.

The door leading into the ground-floor room of the Tower was open, though it was supposed to be locked always, as Tom Barnard well knew. He went into the small, square room, close on Sir Ian's heels, and saw Lady Hereward lying along the floor on her back. She lay so that, as they entered, the top of her head was turned toward them; and they saw her face, as it were, upside down. An expression of agony and despair seemed to be carved upon the stony features, and so terrible was it to see, that Barnard cried out. Sir Ian made no sound, but a slight shudder convulsed his muscles.

There was blood on the floor and on her delicate gray dress, a little, too, on her soft brown hair, which was scarcely disarranged, but none on the marble-white face. Her eyes were wide open, and raised, as if she had died looking at something above her head, and gazing down into them it was as if they stared up

with an expression of anguish straight into Tom Barnard's.

Involuntarily he started back, but controlled himself directly. At first, he saw no wound; then, a second look showed a blackened mark low down in the side of the throat, from which blood had poured, but had now ceased to flow.

"Shot!" he ejaculated, half under his breath.

"Shot," Sir Ian echoed.

"My God, sir, who could have done it?"

"Who, indeed!" the other echoed again.

"You found her like this?"

"Yes. Except that — she was almost on her face. I — turned her over to see — to find out — if she were dead, or only ——"

"I understand, sir. What a ghastly, what an unbelievable thing! I don't believe it now. We shall wake up, sir. It must be some dream."

"Would to God it were," said Sir Ian. "I would die the same death she has died, a hundred times over, if I could bring her back to life. But I can't. That's the horror of it."

"It's enough to drive a man mad, sir," stammered Barnard. "But bear up. At least we'll have revenge on the brute who has done this thing."

"Revenge!" the other man repeated bitterly.

"Oh, I know that won't give her back to you, sir, but flesh and blood is flesh and blood, and it would

be a satisfaction. What beast, what maniac is there vile enough to murder her ladyship, good to every one, loved by every one? It's beyond reason. It's the act of a monster. Why, sir" — and Barnard stooped lower — "did you see — did you notice — her ladyship's rings are gone, the beautiful rings she always wore, and her brooch ——"

"Yes, I — saw," Sir Ian answered, his voice breaking as if at the recollection of that first awful moment when he had seen — what there was to see.

"Then it was a robbery ——"

"It looks like it."

"Some tramp — hiding here in the Tower. The brute — the unspeakable brute! I hope to heaven they'll catch him. I wish I ——"

The muffled sound of feet on the carpet of pine-needles outside broke short Tom's sentence. The doctor had arrived at the same time with a superintendent of police and a constable.

CHAPTER VII

Teresina Ricardo and her cousin's wife did not see each other after Terry came back from Friars' Moat to White Fields, until they met in the drawing-room just before dinner. Maud had been lying down trying to sleep off a headache, when her visitor returned; and Terry, after inquiring for Mrs. Ricardo's health, had gone straight to her room. Thus she had had more than two hours and a half to herself, when precisely at eight o'clock she descended the stairs to the drawing-room. She knew that Mrs. Ricardo was already there, for a message to that effect had just been sent her.

Terry was glad that Maud was so much better; nevertheless, instead of hurrying down to give the news of the afternoon, she kept her room till the last minute. Dinner was at eight; and if Maud's were a punctual household, there would be no time for any private talk before the two must go into the dining-room, and be waited upon by several discreet-looking but sharp-eared footmen.

As it happened, however, it was not a punctual household. Norman Ricardo, a captain in the Navy, away at present in command of his ship, when on leave

enjoyed the luxury of being late for everything. Maud, an American, and a native of New Orleans, was always behind hand on principle. People who knew her invited Mrs. Ricardo to come to their houses at least twenty minutes before they wanted her, by which means she often arrived not more than half an hour late. Such habits did not make for punctuality in kitchen and servants' hall. As the cook was well aware that eight o'clock meant half-past at White Fields, she arranged matters accordingly, to suit herself; and though Terry — only just arrived — had not found it out yet, Mrs. Ricardo's guests, if prompt in assembling for meals, were quite accustomed to converse among themselves in the drawing-room for long before their hostess appeared.

For a great wonder, however, Maud had dashed down to-night at five minutes to eight, and had sent to ask if Terry were ready. She pretended to think that dinner would be announced soon, but as a matter of fact, the two ladies were likely to have half an hour together before being summoned to the dining-room, as the cook had not counted on this promptness.

"You might as well sit down, Terry," Maud said, when Miss Ricardo came in and trailed her white India muslin to an open window. "It may be three or four minutes yet before dinner; and you must be tired."

"I'm not tired," Terry smiled. "Besides, if I had

been, I've had lots of time to rest. How good that you've got over your headache, dear."

"It always flies away at sunset, if I rest. But I *was* disappointed not to go with you this afternoon. Do tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened," said Terry, after an instant's pause. She bent over a great bank of pink and white roses, heaped into a bowl. "Friars' Moat is a beautiful old house — so quaint and interesting, though not huge. I like it all the better for that. Milly didn't come home. Something must have kept her. They'd been lunching with Mrs. Forestier at Riding Wood House. Sir Ian seemed to think that Milly might probably have gone to the village to visit some of her numerous protégés."

"Oh! So you didn't see her?"

"No. But I daresay she'll be over here soon."

"Norman says you and she were the most tremendous friends, when you were a young girl. And Nina Forestier, who knew Milly ages ago, says so, too."

"So we were. Milly was very good to me. I loved her dearly. But you see I went out to India when I was eighteen, and all my real life has been lived there. We wrote to each other often at first, of course; but you know how difficult it is to keep up a correspondence, as years go on, between two people so far separated — whose interests are separated, too."

"I don't know. I love writing letters. I've always

been good about it, haven't I, ever since Norman took me to India on our wedding trip, and introduced me to his fascinating cousin?"

"Thank you for the adjective!"

"You needn't. You know everybody calls you fascinating. It's the word that describes you best, I think. I told Norman so the first day I met you."

"Thank you again." Teresina smiled affectionately at her cousin's wife, whom she liked, though she was not drawn to her as to a congenial spirit.

Maud had the soft charm of many Southern women. She was dark and thin, but not angular, and had pleasant lazy ways which made people feel comfortably restful in her society. No woman in the county dressed more beautifully than she. Her face, pearly pale with the powder which Southern women love, looked extraordinarily young, almost childish, though her curly hair was as white as if it, too, were powdered. She was very proud of that hair of hers, and also of her remarkably long eyelashes, which she used with great effect. Maud had several qualities shared with children and monkeys, one of which was an inordinate but perfectly innocent curiosity; and she caressed or flattered people into doing or saying what she wanted them to do or say. Terry, however, was rather harder to manage in this respect than most of Maud's friends, it appeared; perhaps because she had all her life been used to flattery, or, at least, to receiving compliments.

"Well, what do you think of Sir Ian after these many years?" Mrs. Ricardo went on.

"He has changed, of course. He was a young man when — I saw him last."

"Oh, not so very young, surely. He must have been twenty-eight. *You* aren't so much more, now, dear."

"I'm thirty-one. And what a difference between a man and a woman! Besides, Ian — Sir Ian had hardly begun to live then. Like mine, his real life has been lived alone."

"I suppose all this means that he's gone off."

Terry laughed, quite naturally. "Does one talk of a man's 'going off'? Anyway, Sir Ian hasn't. He's improved in some ways. He looks very strong and brave; a thorough soldier."

"Do you think him handsome?"

"Ye-es. He might pass for handsome. It's a pity he's out of the Army."

"Milly *would* have him give it up, when he came into the title and place. I suppose she wanted him all to herself. She's perfectly devoted to him."

"I'm glad. I'm sure he deserves it."

"He shows his feelings less than she. I'm thankful Norman isn't so cold. I couldn't stand it. I'm too impulsive myself."

"I shouldn't have thought Ian so cold," said Terry, and then a slight shade of vexation passed over her face, as if she were annoyed with herself.

Maud caught up the words.

"Wouldn't you? Perhaps that is part of the change in him since you knew each other. I've known him ever since they settled at Friars' Moat, and he always struck me as being very cold and reserved. No doubt he's fond of Milly in his way, though. They're always together. *That* I envy her."

Terry did not answer. She was not hungry, but she was wondering if dinner would never be announced.

"You knew each other awfully well in India, didn't you?" asked Maud.

"Only for a few weeks."

"Norman believed that Sir Ian was desperately in love with you. Oh, you don't mind my saying that, do you? Norman told me that everybody thought so."

"Everybody! I suppose one person said that."

"I think it was Major Smedley, among others."

"That horror! The worst gossip and tabby-cat who ever lived."

"Perhaps. But there's no harm in saying a man's in love with a girl. Sir Ian wasn't married then."

"I should think not! He hadn't even seen Milly — that is, not since they were both children. He fell in love with her at once, when he was ordered back from India to England, and they met in some romantic way, I suppose. They were engaged a few weeks after, and married within three or four months."

"Yes. It must have been love at first sight, and Milly's charming, of course. I can imagine her being a lovely girl."

"She was. Rather like a young Madonna."

"She's like a Madonna now, and doesn't look a bit more than thirty, though I believe she's older than Sir Ian, if the truth were known."

"A woman's as old as she looks."

"Then you're not more than twenty-four."

"Thank you. I feel a hundred."

"I wish you could have seen Milly to-day."

"Perhaps she'll come over to-morrow. What a beautiful girl Miss Verney is."

"Oh, you saw her? She isn't looking her best now. The course of true love hasn't run smooth."

Terry did not tell Maud that Nora Verney had evidently been crying. She remarked that Sir Ian had said Miss Verney was in sorrow or trouble of some sort.

"Nobody knows what the exact truth is," Maud explained, with relish, "but — I wrote you about Ian Barr, old Sir Ian Hereward's son?"

"Yes. When Sir Ian inherited the title. Yes, it was a strange, sad story. You said he was about twenty then, so he must be twenty-seven now."

"About that. Sir Ian thought it a very hard case, and would have done a lot for young Ian if the boy would have let him. But he wouldn't accept any-

thing except a place as steward, and quite a pretty cottage, where the mother lived with her son till she died. It was good of Sir Ian to make him his steward," Maud went on. "But about six months ago he apparently fell in love with Miss Verney, a girl as friendless and even poorer than he. We thought they were engaged soon after, but suddenly Ian Barr threw over his situation and went away. Nora Verney hasn't been the same girl since then — that is, for the last two months."

"Life is rather tragic, isn't it?" said Terry Ricardo, more to herself than to Maud.

"It's awfully mixed up, anyhow. I wish everybody could be happy, I'm sure — as happy as Norman and I are. *You* ought to marry some nice man, Terry."

"I'm too old to marry," answered the smiling woman, who looked scarcely more than a girl.

"You didn't — of course I oughtn't to ask — but your brother-in-law — it was common gossip that he ——"

"So much nonsense *is* common gossip — especially in India."

"You *know* he was half mad about you!"

"He's old enough to be my father."

"As if that mattered — with a man! If the law had been different ——"

"That wouldn't have made any difference with me.

The children are the dearest things, though! I could almost have married him for their sakes, rather than leave them. But they're growing up, now. And he's married quite a sweet woman, who isn't interesting, but will be a good chaperon for the girls, I'm sure."

"They say he married her in despair, because you ——"

"Oh, Maud, what *shall* I do to you? I shall call for help! Here comes a footman."

"To say dinner's ready."

"Thank goodness!"

"Are you so hungry?"

"I think I must be."

CHAPTER VIII

MAUD RICARDO invariably enjoyed her dinner after a headache had worn off, and to-night there were all the things she liked best to eat. She talked to Terry about the different dishes, and how nice it was to be able to choose what you liked without fear of growing fat. She did not notice that the butler and footman looked very pale, exchanging fearful glances and even a whispered word now and then; but Terry noticed, and wondered if there had been a domestic crisis. Perhaps, she thought, the cook had had a fit, or one of the servants had fallen downstairs. At all events, there was something strange afoot.

The two ladies went back to the drawing-room after dinner, and Maud suggested the terrace for coffee. "We shall see the moon rise," she said; "and, do you know, we can look across from our hill to Friars' Moat, and get a glimpse of the lights twinkling there. One could signal across, if one liked."

It was the butler who brought the tray, not a footman, as usual; and when Mrs. and Miss Ricardo had each taken a tiny old Dresden cup and drunk her coffee, he still hovered vaguely.

"What is it, Dodson?" Maud asked, at last awake

to the fact that all was not as it should be in the servants' world.

"Why, madam, as a matter of fact I hardly know how to tell you." Dodson swallowed drily. "But I thought, if we kept it till dinner was over, it would be best, and then ——"

"Are any of you ill or dead?" Mrs. Ricardo inquired in a slightly injured tone, for it was bad luck enough for one day that she should have a headache. Nobody else in the house had a right to have anything.

"None of *us*, madam. But — a dreadful thing has happened. One of the grooms got the news, and brought it to the house, just before dinner, madam."

Maud grew pale. She was rather a selfish woman, but she loved her husband.

"Not — not an accident to the *Formidable?*" she stammered.

"Oh, no, madam, not so bad as that. It's Lady Hereward. She's dead, madam — murdered."

Mrs. Ricardo's head began to ache again, as if it had been struck by a hammer. She gave a little cry, which sounded almost as if she were angry.

"It's impossible," she exclaimed. "You can't know what you're talking about."

"I only wish, madam, it was a mistake," said the butler. "But I'm afraid there's no chance of that. Her ladyship was found dead this afternoon in Riding Wood, up by the Tower. I believe she had been shot."

Maud felt sick, as if she were going to faint. Her weak nature reached out for help and comfort to some one stronger than herself. Like a frightened child, she turned to Terry, but Terry seemed transformed into a marble statue. Her face was drained of blood, and an expression of horror had frozen upon the clear features. As well seek comfort from a dead woman!

"Terry!" cried Mrs. Ricardo. "Terry, do you hear what he says. Milly Hereward — murdered! Shot in the woods where I walk nearly every day. Oh, it can't be true! Such things don't happen — not to people we know. Milly couldn't be murdered. Why don't you speak? Terry — I believe I'm going to faint."

Then Terry did rouse herself. Her gaze came back from a distance, where it had been held by a terrible picture. She was very cold, and it was an effort to move, as if, even to stir a finger, she had had to break a sheath of ice which encased her body like armour. But she did move, going swiftly to Maud, and sitting down on the sofa beside her.

"Bring brandy," she said to the butler, as she slipped an arm round her cousin's wife, and clasped a hand that groped for hers.

"It's too much for me," Maud murmured. "I've been so ill all day."

"I'm very sorry, madam, if I broke the news too abruptly," said Dodson. "We all thought you ought

to know, and would wish to be told, and I hoped by waiting till after dinner ——"

"Yes, yes; I'm sure Mrs. Ricardo will think you did right," Terry reassured him. "The brandy, please, as quickly as possible."

By the time the butler had returned with a decanter, Maud was so much herself again that curiosity had conquered horror. She thought it rather hard-hearted of Terry to take the hideous news so quietly, for long ago she and Milly Hereward had been intimate friends. Poor Milly! Dead! She could not make it seem true, and said so. Milly was not at all the sort of woman to be murdered. And that afternoon! No, it couldn't, *couldn't* be true. It was hardly decent.

"Drink this, dear," said Terry, so gently that to Maud her voice sounded cold. After all, she thought, Southern women felt far more than others. The mellow old brandy did Maud good. Her heart grew warm again, and her tongue was loosed.

"Tell us everything, Dodson," she directed, as the butler lingered uncertainly, not sure whether it was desirable to go, or wait to be dismissed. "Are you sure some one hasn't made up a horrid cock-and-bull story?"

"Only too sure, madam. Everybody knew already. Jennings heard the news at Riding St. Mary. He'd taken some letters to post, from the servants' hall ——"

"I don't care why he went. Who told him?"

"It was all over the village, madam. Mrs. Barnard, from the home farm at Riding Wood, had sent a man on her bicycle for the doctor and the police."

"Why Mrs. Barnard?" asked Maud, who had no idea of fainting now.

"It seems, madam, that Sir Ian Hereward himself found the body, and came down to the farm looking for Barnard, who used to serve under him, if you remember, madam ——"

It struck Maud that Terry's arm round her waist became suddenly rigid, like a slim bar of iron, then relaxed and fell limp; but she was too intensely excited to think much about Terry just then.

"Sir Ian found her — *dead!* How dreadful!"

"I believe he got anxious because her ladyship didn't return from a walk, and went out to look for her."

Mrs. Ricardo leapt into the loosened girdle of Terry's arm, and turned to stare at her.

"Oh!" she gasped, shuddering. "You were at the house, waiting for her, and all the while she was lying *murdered*. Now *you* mustn't faint, Terry!"

"I won't faint," the other answered, in a dull, tired tone. "Don't think about me."

"I can't think about anybody or anything but Milly," said Mrs. Ricardo, entirely unconscious that she was thinking mostly about herself. "Oh, how it frightens one! It makes one feel as if we were *all* murdered. Dodson, have they an idea who did it?"

"No, madam," Dodson answered reluctantly. "There was robbery. Her ladyship's jewelry was taken, I understand; her rings, and a brooch, all her money, and a little gold case she was in the habit of carrying ——"

"Oh, poor Milly! her vanity box. She always had it dangling from her wrist. I suppose some wretched tramp must have seen it."

"Tramps don't generally have revolvers, madam, that's the queer part; and from what Jennings hears, her ladyship met her death from a revolver shot. They're saying in the village already, it would appear, that there's more than meets the eye."

"Oh, it *must* have been a tramp!" exclaimed Terry. It was the first time that she had broken out impulsively, since the news came.

"In any case, the police are searching the woods," announced Dodson. "It will go hard if they don't hit on some clue."

"Sir Ian must have gone to look for her, after you left Friars' Moat," said Maud, turning again to Terry, to be once more repelled by the frozen, far-away look which she could not help resenting as selfish.

"Yes," Terry replied, as if mechanically.

"What time did they find out?" Mrs. Ricardo went on.

"I don't know exactly, madam. Between five and

six, I believe; but they say the poor lady had been dead more than an hour then."

"What have — they done with her — with the body? But oh, how awful, Terry, to be speaking of poor Milly as a 'body!'"

"They would have carried her home, I should say, madam," the butler volunteered an opinion.

"Poor Sir Ian!" mourned Mrs. Ricardo. "It will almost kill him. And to think of his being there with — with his murdered wife, alone. How he will miss Eric Forestier! He has no intimate friends since Eric died. I wish Norman were here."

"Yes," said Terry.

Maud stared reproachfully. "You hardly seem to sympathize at all!" she cried. "I suppose you're numbed by the shock."

"I suppose I am," the younger woman answered.

"We shan't sleep to-night," wailed Mrs. Ricardo. "I dread the long hours. Oh, how my head aches again. I feel as if there were a horrible tramp hidden under every bed in this house. If only they had caught the man, it would be a little better. Have they no suspicions, Dodson?"

"Well, madam, to tell the truth, Jennings brought in a very queer report from the village," the butler replied, half fearfully, half with a kind of gruesome joy in having something further of mystery and horror to report. "There's a vague rumour that young Mr.

Ian Barr returned to-day, and was seen going into the woods, but no one saw him come out again. The tale is that it was her ladyship who lost Mr. Barr his place as steward, and everybody knows that he was the only person she seemed to have a dislike for. Mr. Barr was always a young gentleman with a high temper, madam, and they've been saying in the servants' hall to-night, what if, in a sudden fit of temper ——"

"No, no!" Mrs. Ricardo cut him short. "I like Mr. Barr. I won't believe it of him. And yet — ah, but it *must* have been a tramp!"

"Let us hope so, madam," the butler responded solemnly. He had no sympathy for tramps.

CHAPTER IX

MAUD said that she would die if left alone that night, and her maid would be worse than no one as a companion; Josephine was a coward, and had such blood-curdling ideas. Terry must come and lie in the bed by Maud's side — not to sleep, of course, because it would be impossible for either to sleep; but to talk — to talk of poor Milly Hereward, and of what to write to Ian in the morning, when they had heard more details, and could tell better what to say.

They did talk: or rather Maud talked, and Terry answered, a night-light making gray twilight in the curtained room, because Maud could not bear the dark. But soon after one, silence began to punctuate straggling sentences; silence at first short, then long; and presently slow, regular breathing told Terry that she was left to watch alone.

At least she was free to think, to ask herself questions and to try and answer them. Lying by Maud's side, tensely alert in mind, she reviewed each minute of the afternoon, from that of her arrival at Friars' Moat, to that when she had bidden Ian Hereward good-bye.

Only — it was difficult to think clearly. One thought would rush in upon another before the first

had time to travel to its logical conclusion. She went back to the moment when the footman had opened the door, and she had asked for Lady Hereward. "Her ladyship went out to lunch with Sir Ian," the servant had said. Then just as she had refused to wait, and was starting away, Ian had come. At first glance she had found him little changed; but by and by, when a slight flush had died away from his face, the illusion of youth faded with it. She had thought he looked worn, and haggard, not as happy as so fortunate a man ought to be.

There was no real reason, she told herself, why the sight of her should have made him sad. As she had said to him, "it was all so long ago." If he had felt no remorse then, why should he suddenly feel it now? He had fallen so desperately in love with Milly that he had thrown all other considerations but that love under his feet and trampled on them. Yet — and yet — what anguish had been in his eyes and tone to-day! His groan when he had broken out with, "Oh, God, Terry!" sounded in her ears still. Never since had she ceased to hear it echoing, alone in her own room, at dinner afterward with Maud, and — more despairing yet through the telling of the butler's story. Could it be possible that Ian's marriage had not proved a success, after all he had sacrificed to make it? Miss Ricardo could scarcely believe that it had been a failure, for as a young girl she had worshipped

Millicent Latham, and could easily imagine that a man could adore her. Once Terry had heard some one say, "Milly Latham is an acquired taste, but once the taste *is* acquired, it's bound to last." She had recalled that speech when she heard of Sir Ian's engagement to his distant cousin; and she recalled it again now.

Milly had seemed to forget all about Terry in the midst of sunshine and marriage; but, in the peculiar circumstances (of which Terry believed her one-time friend to have remained in ignorance), it was better that she should forget. Things being as they were, their intimacy could not have gone on. But now Terry's heart yearned over the dead woman.

"Poor, poor Milly!" She wondered if she had ever thought of Ian's wife unkindly or unjustly? She trusted that she had not. To harbour harsh thoughts would indeed have been unjust, for nothing had been Milly's fault. Ian no doubt had been silent about the past, and Terry herself had kept the secret well. A few hints she might have given in letters at the time, perhaps, before she had known Ian would be leaving India for England. She had mentioned meeting a "cousin of Milly's"; Milly had written back to know "what he was like," and Terry had described him rather enthusiastically, as she had seen him then. That was all. Poor Milly! Ian had been swept off his feet at first sight of her; and Maud said now that

they were devoted to each other. Yet that "Oh, God, Terry!" What did it mean, that stifled cry of the heart?

Teresina Ricardo would have given a great deal if she had been able to stop her ears and shut out the echo of that cry; but it was inside her head, and could not be shut out.

Her imagination, whose vividness was a curse as well as a blessing in her life, clearly sketched a woman's figure walking under great trees in a wood. Then, another figure grew out of shadows, and followed. Whose figure?

Terry had a horrible feeling, born of over-wrought nerves, that if she looked long enough at the picture, she would see whose the shadowy figure was, and know the awful secret of the murder. But she dared not know. She did not want to know. Justice would find out in time. She would not be in the secret if she could: and she thought with a strange pang of Miss Verney. That girl had been in the woods. She had said so. What had she seen? What did she know? Something had happened to blanch her cheeks, to redden her eyes, and give her the look of a hunted deer. What thing? At all events, Miss Verney's agitation and her confession — no, no, not *that* word in this connection! — her statement, rather, that she had been in the woods, made up a mysterious coincidence. If she had met her lover there — if it were

true that he hated Lady Hereward — but Terry broke the thought almost fiercely in her brain. She was angry with herself for letting it steal in. Maud's description of Sir Ian's namesake — his cousin in blood — was not the description of a murderer, it seemed to Terry. She had liked what Maud said of him; the young man, bravely if obstinately waging his fight against the world which denied him a place; yet here she was suspecting him, vulgarly, just like any inmate of the servants' hall. Besides, no one could really hate Milly. She was always kind, always unselfish, even to those she did not like; so Maud said.

Thus the night passed; a white night for Terry Ricardo, and a white night for the world, bathed in moonlight. Yet in the forest, whose Gothic aisles were paved with ebony and ivory moonshine and shadow, there were sounds other than the whispering of pines and beeches, or the rustling of tiny wood-folk among the feathery bracken. Dark figures of men moved under the trees; lanterns flashed like the yellow eyes of spying cats; low voices murmured solemnly, or broke out in exclamations at the sudden bell-note of dogs baying; for the police had brought bloodhounds to Riding Wood, and were trying to trace the murderer of Lady Hereward.

CHAPTER X

Next afternoon Miss Ricardo received notice that she would be called as witness at the inquest, which would be held at Friars' Moat the following day. The police learned from a footman that she had called there to see Lady Hereward, and had had tea with Sir Ian and Miss Verney, not very long after the time when the murder must have been committed. A coroner's officer appeared at White Fields and Terry had to answer some questions.

It was dreadful to her that she must go to the inquest, but she was hardly surprised at the summons. She had half expected and greatly feared that it might come. Maud was horrified, and inclined to think it an insult to the whole Ricardo family that one of them should be called upon to give evidence about a murder. "What can you know?" she asked. "Do they suppose you can tell who killed that poor dear? I should refuse to stir a step if I were you. But if you *do* go, I shall go with you, and we will both wear black, of course."

Mrs. Ricardo seemed somewhat surprised that Terry did not appear to think it mattered what she wore. She had no black dress, so Maud chose a gray gown for her to put on, and a black hat, which was almost

too becoming for such an occasion. "Poor Milly would have admired you in it. She had such taste!" Mrs. Ricardo sighed. "And she was fond of gray. She had a gray-embroidered voile this summer that — oh, perhaps she was *wearing* it on Saturday at Nina Forestier's. I suppose Nina will be a witness too."

Maud and Terry Ricardo drove away from White Fields in a closed brougham, very new and smart, as everything was, or appeared to be, at White Fields, which was a handsome modern house without individuality.

It was but a short distance to Friars' Moat, yet the two places were centuries apart, and as the carriage stopped before the door, Terry thought sadly what a pity it was that this beautiful old house should become hateful forever to its owner, the last of his name. She had told herself, fancifully, day before yesterday, that somehow the place was like Ian; and she felt this still; but both man and house were very tragic now.

Here Ian lived happily with the woman he loved for seven years. Here her murdered body had been brought home, blood-stained and terrible. Here, in some room which she had perhaps helped to make homelike and charming, that body now slept. Here Ian Hereward must go through another agonizing ordeal to-day, only less dreadful than that he had endured when fate led him to find his dead wife in the woods.

The day was one of those perfect days in June,

which come often after rain. Last night there had been a heavy shower which had sent the temperature down, and the air smelled of a thousand flowers, whose perfume mingled with the sweet scent of new-cut grass and the freshness of moist earth. It seemed a day made for youth and happiness. The heavy sense of oppression was gone from the atmosphere, and the lawns and flower-beds shining in the gay summer sunlight were so beautiful that it was almost impossible to believe in the tragedy behind the drawn window-curtains of the old house. But once inside, it became easy to believe. A door at the left of the oak-panelled hall was kept by a policeman in uniform. It was the door of the library; for in the library the inquest was to be held. Mrs. Ricardo, as a relative of a witness, was allowed to go in, and though she shuddered, and was very pale under her powder, it would have been a bitter disappointment to miss the great drama about to be enacted. She had heard comparatively few details of the murder, for people contradicted each other, and there were the wildest rumours afloat. Some said that a gypsy had been arrested, others that no arrest had been made, but that the police had "something up their sleeve" which would come out through witnesses at the inquest. Maud Ricardo sincerely believed that she was very sad, heavily oppressed by the tragedy which had fallen on the house, but in reality all that was primitive in her —

and there was much — thrilled with a delicious, painful curiosity. She had written a letter of sympathy to Sir Ian Hereward. Now she would soon see how he bore his trouble.

Miss Ricardo did not shudder; but she, too, was very pale and there were dark circles round the hazel eyes which had made Richard the footman disloyal to Miss Verney's beauty. Terry knew no more than Maud knew, of what an inquest would be like, and she feared everything, but her face and manner were as composed as if she had come to hear a lecture. As they were admitted into the library, her eyes travelled round the room, searching for Sir Ian and Miss Verney, but neither was there. She had been foolish, Terry told herself, to think that she might see them. They were both mourners; the husband and the trusted girl-companion of the murdered woman. Doubtless they would be spared as much as possible, and would only be called in when the time came for them to speak.

Terry had not seen the library before, but she knew that its grim aspect of to-day was not its aspect of other days. In itself, it was a pleasant room, lined with old books and new, the top shelf displaying rare pottery, and a few marble busts that stood out against the dark oak wall. There were many, many books and the two mullioned windows, with their quaintly fashioned crests on panes of painted glass, looked out on

the lawns, one with a sundial rising from a bed of roses, one with a marvellous cedar of Lebanon. But to-day the library was a dreadful room. In the middle was a long Tudor table, on either side of which were ranged chairs for the coroner, his clerk, the chief constable of the county, the deputy chief constable, a superintendent of police, an inspector from Scotland Yard and a detective inspector. A long row of seats for the fifteen jurors stretched in front of the window which looked out upon the Lebanon cedar; and before the fireplace was a table with chairs for eight members of the press. Near the corner was a chair for the witness while being examined.

The jury having been sworn, their foreman was elected and then, on the order of the coroner, the fifteen men went out to look at the dead body of Lady Hereward. When they filed back again into the library, their faces, grave enough before, were masks of solemnity. A light like anger smouldered in some men's eyes; for it would have been hard to find fifteen jurors in the neighbourhood of Riding St. Mary, none of whose families had received kindness from Sir Ian Hereward and his wife. Having gazed upon all that was mortal of the fair Lady Bountiful, the fifteen men realized fully that they were here, in this house which had been her home, to solve — if they could — the mystery of her death; in other words, to find the murderer and help the hangman to put a noose round his neck.

CHAPTER XI

Colonel Sir Ian Hereward, the first witness, was called by the police sergeant who guarded the door.

Probably there was not a person in the room who did not sympathize deeply with the man who had been so tragically bereaved; yet as the door opened and he walked in, curiosity was the emotion uppermost in every heart. People who were acquainted with the man, or knew him by sight, vaguely expected to see him changed by the horror which had broken his life; but Ian Hereward had not been a soldier in vain. He did not totter in as if staggering under a load, nor was his head bowed, nor were his shoulders bent. He looked as he had looked many times when he had gone into battle—grave, composed, expressionless, as a man who faces an ordeal should look when watched by many eyes.

He took his place in the witness's chair. The room was very still, and the rustling of papers which the coroner rather uneasily sorted before beginning his catechism sent a sharp little thrill through highly keyed nerves.

Then the usual questions were put at the start. How old was Lady Hereward? How long had they

lived at Friars' Moat? — questions which most persons present could have answered as well as the witness. Catechised, Sir Ian told how he and his wife had been in Paris for a fortnight, and how, the day before yesterday, which was the day after their return from the Continent, they had walked together to lunch at Riding Wood House with their friend Mrs. Forestier. They had taken the way through the woods, intending to walk home also.

"Were you accustomed to walking through the woods together?" asked Mr. Samways, the coroner, who, having once been a doctor in Riding St. Mary, still lived there, and in his private capacity as a man and neighbour, knew perfectly well that Sir Ian and Lady Hereward were in the habit of walking through Riding Wood. His mind gave him the answer "Yes," before it came from the witness's lips.

"What time did you and Lady Hereward start to return to Friar's Moat?"

"About a quarter past three — or a little before."

"Have you any particular reason for remembering the time of your start?"

Sir Ian hesitated for an instant. "The weather was oppressive, and my wife preferred not to walk fast," he replied.

"Did you wish to arrive at home by a certain hour?"

"Soon after four," said Sir Ian, rather shortly.

"Was there something that Lady Hereward or you

intended to do when you got back?" the coroner went on, and those who listened began to take a keen interest in his line of questioning, as it was evident that he had a point to make.

"We usually had tea between half-past four and five," Sir Ian said.

"Were you expecting any visitor or visitors to tea that day?"

The witness's face changed, ever so slightly; but it did change, as if the question had not been among those put to him previously by the police. The more sharp-sighted of the jurymen noticed this, and wondered if Sir Ian had perhaps not intended to mention the fact that a visitor was expected. All waited eagerly to hear a name or names, which were sure to come out and must be of interest.

"We thought it possible that there might be visitors." (Was there reluctance in his tone?)

"Several?"

"Two."

"Will you kindly give their names?"

"Is that necessary?"

(There was no longer any doubt. Sir Ian had not wished to mention the expected visit!)

"Yes, I believe it to be necessary."

"Mrs. Forestier said at luncheon, she understood that Mrs. Ricardo of White Fields meant to call with a cousin of hers, at Friars' Moat, some time after four."

He answered quite freely now, making the best of a business which he thought bad, for he would have given much to have kept Teresina Ricardo's name out of this terrible affair, and had indeed tried to do so. But seeing that, in spite of his deliberate concealment, by some means or other the coroner was already informed of Miss Ricardo's visit, Sir Ian realized that harm rather than good would be done by refusing to answer with apparent frankness.

"You and Lady Hereward, then, started home in time to meet these ladies, should they call?"

"We did."

"Would it not have been quicker to go by carriage or motor along the road?"

"Yes, but we had not ordered ours to come for us, and though Mrs. Forestier offered to send us home, so that we might stop a little longer, my wife said that she would like to walk."

"It was her express wish to walk?"

"Yes."

"What way did you take through the woods?"

"The path that leads by the stone Tower."

"Is that the shortest way?"

"No, it is a slight detour. It means going rather higher along the hill than there is a need to go."

"Why did you choose to make that detour, if you were in a hurry?"

"It takes only a few minutes longer, and there is a finer view."

"Was it, then, because you desired to see the view, that you went by the upper path that leads past the Tower?"

"My wife said that she wanted to go by the Tower."

"When you reached the Tower, did you and Lady Hereward walk on together?"

"No. I went on alone."

Every eye in the room was fixed on the ex-soldier, and it seemed strange to no one that his face should pale to the ash-gray which is the only pallor a colourless, bronzed skin can show.

"Why did you leave Lady Hereward?" the merciless-seeming voice of the coroner continued. It was merciless only in seeming, however. There did not live a more kindly-natured man than little Mr. Samways, and never had he disliked doing his duty as coroner more than he disliked it to-day. He knew how agonizing these memories must be to Sir Ian Hereward, whom he respected and admired. He knew how this hero of many battles must be reproaching himself because, though all unwittingly, he had gone away and left a beloved woman undefended, to meet a ghastly fate.

Again there was a slight pause before the witness answered. When he did speak, he spoke slowly, and in a low, though clear voice.

"I left my wife because she asked me to go. She wished to be left there by herself for a little time."

It was now the coroner's turn to pause. He seemed to be thinking this response over, or else to be giving time for the jury to do so.

"Was the door of the Tower open when you were there with Lady Hereward?" was the next question that he asked.

"Not that I know of. I didn't notice. We didn't go in," replied Sir Ian.

"Do you know whether the door is usually locked?"

"I believe it is supposed to be locked."

"Are several people in possession of keys which fit the door?"

"Mrs. Forestier has one, of course, as the Tower is on her estate. Possibly two or three persons in her employ have them. Mrs. Forestier gave us one some years ago, with permission to have tea there if we ever cared to, knowing that my wife was fond of the view."

"Did you often use the key?"

"Hardly ever. I haven't even seen it for a long time."

"Do you think it likely that Lady Hereward had it with her, when she went out to lunch?"

"No, not likely — but possible."

"Could she have had it, without your knowing?"

"She could have kept it in a little bag she carried with her handkerchief and purse — quite a small bag,

embroidered in beads. She sometimes put her gloves into it, too."

"Why do you think the key was not there?"

"Because — the bead bag was found, empty, and the key of the Tower door has since been discovered, here in the house."

"Where was it discovered?"

"In a room my wife used as a sitting-room."

"Her boudoir?"

"Not exactly a boudoir. She attended to all business there, as well as a sitting-room, saw the servants, indoor and outdoor servants, when necessary, and poor people who used to come and tell her their troubles, expecting her to help them. The key has been found in the drawer of her writing-desk."

"Who found it?"

"I did, with the inspector of police."

"What led you to look for it there?"

"I thought it would have been in one of those drawers if anywhere. Besides, I was obliged to — we were looking through my wife's papers."

"You have no reason to think that any one else knew where she kept this key, or could have replaced it after the murder?"

"I have no reason to think anything of the kind."

"Where exactly did you leave Lady Hereward, on parting from her in the wood?"

"On a seat shaped out of an old tree-trunk on the left side of the Tower."

"Did she say she would soon join you?"

"She didn't say; but I supposed she wouldn't be very long."

"Because of the expected guests?"

"Well, yes."

"Did you think it strange that she should wish you to go on and leave her alone?"

"No. I thought it natural, in the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"My wife was exhausted. It was — very warm, you will remember."

"Had she ever before asked you to leave her alone in the woods?"

"She may have. She occasionally went alone to this seat near the Tower, with a book."

"May other people besides yourself have been aware of this habit of hers?"

"It hardly amounted to a habit."

"When you arrived at Friars' Moat, had your expected guests arrived?"

"Yes — that is ——"

"The two ladies?"

"Only one."

"Which?"

"Miss Ricardo."

"Is she an old friend of yours and Lady Hereward's?"

"We both knew her, years ago, when she was a very young girl, but hadn't seen her since."

"Where did you know the lady — in England?"

"My wife knew her in England, before our marriage. I met Miss Ricardo in India, when I was stationed there. Her cousin, Mrs. Ricardo, our neighbour, was to have called, but was ill with a headache, and sent Miss Ricardo alone, rather than put us out, in case we had been told that they would come."

"Did you have tea with this lady, on returning home?"

"Yes, when Miss Verney came in — my wife's companion."

"Had Miss Verney been out?"

"I believe so."

"Did you know where?"

"I think — in the woods."

"Did you ask her if she had met Lady Hereward?"

"Yes, but she said she had not."

"Did you feel anxious when Lady Hereward did not return?"

"I thought I would look for her, when Miss Ricardo had gone, and I — did so."

"You went back to the place where you had left her?"

"Yes."

Now, once more, the eager curiosity with which every one had listened to the story, as given in question

and answer between the coroner and the witness, was overcome by a wave of sympathy for the pale man, thus led to the most terrible point in his narrative.

"Did you meet any one on the way?"

"No one."

"Or see any one at a distance?"

"I noticed no one."

"Were you absorbed in your own thoughts?"

"Perhaps."

"Could any one have passed at some distance without your attention being aroused?"

"Possibly. I don't know."

"What did you first observe on reaching the knoll where the Tower stands?"

"When I saw that my wife wasn't on the seat where I left her, I noticed rather to my surprise that the door of the Tower stood a little way open. I thought that she might be in the room — that she'd found the door unlocked, and gone in."

"You didn't think she had unlocked it?"

"I didn't think of that, at the moment."

"What did you see when you went in?"

Sir Ian's nostrils quivered. He tightened his lips, as if to keep them from quivering too. Then, for the first time he bowed his head, and told the story of what he had seen, with a voice that broke more than once. He told what he had seen, and what he had done; how he had run down to the home farm of

Riding Wood, to fetch Tom Barnard, and all that had happened there. As to the details of the sight he had had to look upon in the tower room, as few questions as possible were put, for other witnesses could paint that picture. Only, at the last, the coroner desired Sir Ian to tell the jury whether he had touched the body of his dead wife, or whether he had in any way disturbed the arrangement of the tower room as he found it on entering.

"I put my hand on her breast, to see whether her heart beat," the witness answered dully, looking older and more haggard than when he had been called into the room. "I thought perhaps she might be living still. And when I found that her heart had stopped, I touched her hand. It was cold. I knew, then — there was no hope."

"Did you notice anything about her hand?"

"I noticed that her rings were gone — rings she constantly wore. And that made me look to see if her other jewelry were missing. Her bracelet-watch was gone, and a brooch she had been wearing."

"Anything else?"

"I didn't think of it then, but afterward it was discovered that a gold case, like a cigarette-case, which my wife always carried, had disappeared. Ladies call that kind of thing a vanity box."

"Could she have dropped it in the woods on the way to the Tower?"

"She might have, but I don't think it likely, for though it used to slide off her lap sometimes, in the house, or she would leave it on a table, she always missed it instantly; and when she was walking, it hung from her wrist by its chain. It wasn't very valuable, I think; not worth more than twenty or thirty pounds, but she was particularly attached to it, for some reason."

"Had you ever seen the inside of this case, or vanity box?"

"Never."

"Could papers have been kept inside?"

"Only very small ones, if any."

"Could it have been possible that Lady Hereward had a reason other than the one she gave you, for wanting to be left alone near the Tower?"

"Other than the one she gave me?" Sir Ian repeated this question with a very slight yet peculiar emphasis, as if he wished to mark it in some way, in his mind. "No, I do not think so."

"She could not have expected to meet any one?"

"I feel sure she did not."

"Is there any one who, to your knowledge, had a grudge against her?"

For the third time when giving an answer, Sir Ian paused. His eyes were raised, and introspective, with an expression of distress, as if he saw some ugly image in his mind. "No," he said, at last.

"There is no one whom you could *possibly suspect* of having such a grudge?"

Sir Ian's pale face reddened with a sudden rush of blood which flowed over it, to the roots of his dark hair. "I do not think that a fair question," he said, "and I refuse to answer it. It ought to be enough that I know of no person who, even with a grudge, I should believe capable of murder."

"I am afraid I must insist on your answering the question," said the coroner, feeling miserable, and looking as miserable as he felt.

"Very well, then, I suspect no one," said Sir Ian.

"Remember, you are on oath."

"You have my answer." And the soldier-face was very stern and grim.

Greatly as Mr. Samways liked and admired Sir Ian Hereward, heartily sorry as he was for the ex-soldier's tragic affliction, and deeply as he regretted the official necessity of asking disagreeable questions (some of which had become necessary because of discoveries just made), he would not have been human, he would not have had a proper respect for his own calling, if he had not found himself slightly nettled by the attitude his chief witness now took. It defied him, set him at naught both as man and coroner; and as he had tried his best to be considerate throughout the whole examination, he thought that he had deserved a different tone from Sir Ian. Several details into

which he really ought to have inquired, if only as a matter of form, he had let slide, rather than distress the bereaved husband; and there was one query in particular which he had felt bound, yet dreaded, to put. Perhaps, had Sir Ian spoken less brusquely, and looked less haughtily obstinate, he might have decided to waive it, with others, questioning later witnesses instead, as the whole county had always praised the devotion of the Herewards to one another. But as it was, feeling himself ill-used, suddenly he discovered that it was no longer so disagreeable a task to throw a certain question at Sir Ian's proud head.

"Were you invariably on affectionate terms with Lady Hereward?" he bluntly inquired.

Then, to the surprise of every one present, Sir Ian went from dark red to ghastly white. He looked as if he had been struck to the death. Not a man in the room but felt his nerves jump under the shock of a new and astounding suspicion.

CHAPTER XII

They hung on his answer. But when it came, it was entirely commonplace.

"We were always on the best of terms, during thirteen years of married life."

There was no quaver of his voice, no flinching of the gaze to account for the sudden rush and ebb of blood. It had seemed a tell-tale change of colour, following as it did upon such a question, which in some form or other he must have expected, and was like the silent revealing of a black secret guessed by none. Yet what could be made out of the reply? There was a ring of truth in it and the query appeared to be fully answered. Yet — there was a dim impression of something wrong, something hidden, something in the words more or less than met the ear. "On the best of terms during thirteen years of married life." What could any coroner or juror ask beyond that?

The coroner, at all events, did not intend to ask anything further of importance for the present. He let Sir Ian Hereward go, after putting a few questions concerning the theory of the robbery, and called Mrs. Barnard, frightened and anxious, but more at ease than she would have been in the hands of any other

questioner. Before Mr. Samways became coroner, he had been the favourite doctor of the farming community, and had brought Poppet into the world.

Clearly and truthfully Rose gave the history of her afternoon — the afternoon of the murder. How she had been in the arbour, with her little daughter, and Kate Craigie had come, and at about four o'clock they had heard two shots, which Kate had thought sounded queer. How Kate had gone home a little later, and after tea — oh, a good while after — when she was washing up the dishes, Sir Ian had made Poppet scream out by suddenly appearing, covered with blood. No, not covered; she hadn't meant that. To say "covered" was a great exaggeration. She had spoken impulsively, as women will. Sir Ian had been very much agitated, stammering out something about her ladyship being in the Tower, dead; and he wished to find Barnard, who used to serve under him in the Army before Sir Ian came into his title, and got Tom his present position through his influence with Mr. Forestier. Why, yes, of course Barnard owed Sir Ian a big debt of gratitude, and would do anything for him, so it was natural enough the poor gentleman should go there before going anywhere else. Besides, the farmhouse was near. But unfortunately Barnard was away, so she had to do the best she could. And Sir Ian wouldn't wait for Tom. He would rush back to the woods, where her poor

ladyship was lying, though it seemed an awful thing to Rose that he should have to be there with the dead body of his wife, all alone, and nobody to help him bear his grief and horror.

Kate was called, after Rose, describing her impression of the two shots, and inclining to be somewhat sensational, as servants will. She had been fond of her mistress, in a jealously passionate, ill-regulated way, yet she thoroughly enjoyed giving evidence. She felt herself of immense importance, and the wish to be first with every one she approached was almost a mania with Kate Craigie, though she was unconscious of this peculiarity in herself.

When asked on what terms Sir Ian Hereward lived with his wife, she knew that all eyes were fastened upon her. She wished ardently to say something which could hold the interest she was arousing, something more than she had already said to the police.

"I think her ladyship was more in love with Sir Ian, than he was with her," Kate replied, half frightened at her own temerity. Still, she reminded herself, it was not only her duty to tell the truth, but the *whole* truth.

"What do you mean by that?" inquired the coroner sternly.

Now indeed, Kate must justify herself! She replied that her ladyship thought of nothing but to look well in her husband's eyes, and pleasing him with her style

of dress, and way of doing her hair. If he didn't like a thing she wore, that was the end of it forever. Liane, her ladyship's French maid, into whose place she(Kate) had stepped ten weeks ago, was very clever about that sort of thing, and took advantage of her mistress's peculiarity in her own interest. If Liane fancied a hat, for instance, she would say, "Miladi, I am sure from the way he looked at you in it, Sir Ian detested you in that hat, though he is far too polite to say so. He only turned his eyes away." That was enough for her ladyship. Liane would get the hat; and the same with dresses and blouses. Her ladyship would begin to hate a thing if she had the idea that it made her look old; for she really was a bit older than Sir Ian, and extremely sensitive about her age, though very few would have guessed her feeling. Liane used to order creams and things for the complexion, or to keep the neck firm, in her own name, but they were really for her ladyship; and it was because of this, as well as little tricks about doing the hair, that her ladyship valued Liane so much. In Kate's opinion, Liane was a sly, worthless creature, but she couldn't say the French girl had any grudge against her mistress. Liane disappeared, it is true, but not on account of a "row," so far as Kate knew, and her ladyship was forever quoting Liane, saying nobody else could do as well as Liane could, no matter how they might try. Liane had probably had a love affair, and had wanted to

leave her place for that reason, as her ladyship didn't much like such things going on in the house. As for Sir Ian, he had always seemed very pleasant with his wife, but he didn't have quite the same air of thinking the sun rose and set in her ladyship, that she had for him. He was absent-minded, sometimes, and fond of reading in the library by himself; but they were on very good terms indeed, and in Paris he took his wife everywhere, shopping, and to the theatres, and bought her several handsome presents. On the last morning of her ladyship's life, Sir Ian had come into her room while she was polishing her nails, and Kate was putting away a few things. They had talked to each other as pleasantly as possible, and made plans for a few days' stay in town by and by. She had never heard the slightest dispute between them. Her ladyship did not appear to have any trouble or secrets, except some little ones of the toilet, which did not count seriously. If she had had secrets, Kate would have been likely to guess, or would have heard something from Liane, who used to talk rather freely about her mistress in the servants' hall. But Kate believed that Lady Hereward had been a very happy woman, up to the day of her death, and was, on the whole, a lady easy to get on with. The only person Kate had ever heard her scold was Miss Verney, her ladyship's companion.

Had Kate seen Lady Hereward in the woods, on her

way to visit Mrs. Barnard? No, she hadn't, nor had any idea her ladyship was there, though she left the farm sooner than she would have liked, perhaps about a quarter after four, in order to reach Friars' Moat by teatime, thinking that her mistress might be back and wanting something then. She had seen nobody in the woods but Miss Verney. No, not on the way back, but when going to the farm she had seen Miss Verney. On the way back she had met no one — that is, only the footman, from Friars' Moat. He had perhaps guessed that she (Kate) would be returning through the woods. No, she and Edward were not exactly engaged, though they had been near it once. They often had quarrels. Edward was of an odd disposition, and Kate was not sure whether she would do well to marry him or not. Her ladyship had advised her not to encourage him.

Here was another little detail not elicited by the first questioning of Kate Craigie by the police. She had not then mentioned the fact that her ladyship was against the match between her maid and the footman, or that she particularly disapproved of love-making in the servants' hall. But it was easy to believe that this might have been true, as it was well known that Lady Hereward, despite her many charities, held certain rather strict (some people called them "narrow-minded") views.

The coroner looked frowningly at Kate. Too many

unexpected issues seemed to be developing in this case. He felt himself ill-used, in that he had not been sufficiently prepared.

"Did the footman, Edward, know that Lady Hereward wished you to give him up?" was the next question; and it showed Kate the mischief done by her loose way of answering. She had not needed to say that about her mistress and Edward, and she could have boxed her own ears for her carelessness, because, whatever Edward might be, he loved her only too well. Blushing painfully, she said Edward had perhaps guessed at her ladyship's disapproval, but it did not discourage him. He was always hopeful, and as long as he wasn't discharged, there was not much for him to be cross about.

Had Kate ever heard Edward say anything about Lady Hereward, as if he were angry at her attitude toward him? Well, he might have said little things, like any quick-tempered young man would, in the circumstances, but nothing of any importance. She had never thought anything of what he said. Did he refer to the subject when they met in the woods on the afternoon of the murder? Oh, as to that Kate could hardly remember. He might have just mentioned it, no more than a few words. What words? Kate was sure — flushing deeply — that she couldn't repeat them. Such words went in at one ear and out at the other.

Had Edward been excited, when she met him in the woods?

Dear no, not particularly. He was a bit emotional and always got worked up, on one thing and another, when talking to her, that was all, indeed.

Another new suspicion flung at the heads of the jury! Hardly had they recovered from the shock of the first, when there came a second; but after the first, it was a relief to have a second to fall back upon, of so little importance was poor Edward, a footman, compared with his master, Sir Ian Hereward.

Next after Kate came Teresina Ricardo. Thus far, the witnesses had followed each other in order, according to the bearing of their evidence upon the case. Sir Ian's testimony had naturally been taken first, since he had been in his wife's company for some hours before the murder, and had left her in the woods, close to the Tower where she met her death. Rose Barnard and Kate Craigie had together heard the shots; one of which, in all probability, had killed Lady Hereward. Miss Ricardo, it had been ascertained, was one of the first persons who saw Sir Ian after his return through the woods, where he had parted with his wife, therefore her testimony fitted in at this point which had been reached.

If Terry had needed a warning, Kate's experience in the hands of the coroner would have given it. "Nothing can be asked of me that wasn't asked by that police-

man yesterday," she tried to be sure, yet she called upon her soul to stand firm.

As she rose to go to the witness's chair where Sir Ian had sat, and Mrs. Barnard and Kate Craigie, the door was opened by the guardian policeman outside. A visiting-card with something written upon it in pencil was passed in, and up to the coroner. A whispered discussion followed among the officials assembled at the table, and presently an answer went back to the door. Some one was admitted, and the questioning of Miss Ricardo was delayed until the slight disturbance should be over. Terry did not turn her head to look at the door. She stood, ready to go to the coroner's table when she should be wanted, but that would not be quite yet, for the coroner's clerk had got up, and was talking to the person who had come in. Then the clerk returned, and spoke with the coroner, handing him a piece of paper, which might have been a leaf torn from a note-book. There was a little more conferring, and then Miss Ricardo was requested to take her place in the chair by the coroner. As she obeyed, she saw the face of the newcomer, who had been given a seat. He was looking at her, and their eyes met. His were of yellowish brown, like the thin hair and stubby moustache, which was turning gray — a dirty, unattractive gray. His complexion was yellowish too, and there were baggy wrinkles under the cold eyes.

"Alligator eyes!" Terry said to herself, as she had said before of the same eyes. It was many years since she had seen the man, but she knew him at once, for he had changed little. He was one of those persons whom it is impossible to imagine as ever having been much younger, or as ever growing much older. It was Major Smedley, the man at whom Terry had cried out as "the worst old gossip and tabby-cat that ever lived," when Maud had mentioned his name, just before news of the murder came to White Fields.

The armour of strength which she had girded on seemed to loosen at the joints.

She was afraid of Major Smedley.

CHAPTER XIII

TERRY'S examination by the coroner began exactly as she had reason to expect that it would begin. But by and by fell the blow she had been dreading since she had recognized Major Smedley.

It fell in the form of a question, following upon one which concerned her early acquaintance with Lady Hereward, then Miss Millicent Latham.

"Did Miss Latham introduce Captain Hereward to you?"

"No," said Terry. "But the first time I ever met him I happened to find out that he was a very distant cousin of my friend Miss Latham."

"Did you correspond with her about him?"

"I wrote that I had met a cousin of hers whom she hadn't seen since they were children."

"How long did your acquaintance with Captain Hereward last before he left India?"

"Only a few weeks."

"Is it true that Captain Hereward wished to marry you?"

Now Terry could guess very well what had been written on that bit of paper which the coroner had read and discussed with the chief constable and the

detective-inspector from Scotland Yard. She had known, the moment she saw Major Smedley, what would happen. "How like him," she thought, "to come here and mix himself up in this awful business, just because of the prominence it will give him in his clubs! He has volunteered to come and bear witness and he has put them up to ask me things that without some horrid hint from him wouldn't even have seemed of importance."

Suddenly, in her disgustful anger against the man, she ceased to be afraid. She knew that when Major Smedley had a grudge against people he made a boast of "paying them out," if it took half his life; and he had had a grudge against her for thirteen years. She had been a very popular girl in Indian society, and had snubbed him with all the frankness of youth, when he tried to be "nice to her." Many women would have liked to do the same, but did not dare. He knew too much about them, and to have a weapon was to use it, with Major Smedley. But there was nothing which a girl of eighteen need fear to have known about herself; and hating the character of a malicious male gossip more than most others, she had taken some pleasure in being disagreeable to the "horrid old tabby." Ian had snubbed him, too; for Captain Hereward had little more to hide from the world in those days than had Miss Teresina Ricardo, the débutante; and even if he had secrets to keep, he was not the sort of man

to keep them at the price of a cowardly civility to a person he detested. Now after all these years, evidently, it had seemed to Major Smedley that his time had come at last to scratch in good earnest. Nothing on earth would delight such a creature more than a chance to throw suspicion on Sir Ian Hereward through Miss Ricardo.

But Miss Ricardo determined that he should not succeed. She would not let Ian be hurt through her. No matter what she might have to say, she would not hurt Ian.

The calmness that blew like a cooling breeze upon the heat of her excitement was strange to Terry, but she was thankful for it.

After a scarcely perceptible pause, she said in response to the coroner's question: "I do not think that Captain Hereward ever wished to marry me." And almost she would have been glad if Ian had been there to hear her answer. "Within three months after our first meeting," she went on, without waiting for another question to come, "he had fallen desperately in love with my friend Miss Latham, and was engaged to her."

As she spoke, she allowed her eyes to move about the room and rest for an instant on Major Smedley's face. She hoped that she could read disappointment upon it, and a catty annoyance that the question had been put in a way to give her this chance of wriggling

out. If he had been the coroner, it would have been different. He would have known exactly what to say.

"Was there never anything serious between you and Sir Ian, then Captain Hereward?" the coroner went on, looking relieved.

"Captain Hereward never thought of me at all seriously," Terry returned courageously. "Never. We saw just enough of each other for some people to fancy there was a flirtation, I suppose."

Again a cold glance at Major Smedley. He looked, she thought, like an ugly Burmese idol.

"You never met Sir Ian Hereward again till the day before yesterday?"

Terry replied that she had not.

"Did you correspond with him in the interval?"

"Oh, no. Miss Latham — Lady Hereward and I wrote to each other occasionally. Not very often." Miss Ricardo did not think it necessary to state that the letters had ceased after Milly Latham's marriage.

"You were always on good terms then, with Lady Hereward?"

"Of course. She had been very kind to me when I was an insignificant little girl, and she was a charming young woman, with hosts of important and interesting friends."

Miss Ricardo was doing her very best for Sir Ian Hereward, though never had that mysterious cry of

his — "Oh, God, Terry!" — rung more confusingly in her ears. And whatever came, she meant to go on doing her best.

"Did you expect Lady Hereward to be at home to receive you the day before yesterday, when you called at Friars' Moat?"

Terry's raised eyebrows expressed precisely what she wished them to express. "I really wasn't sure whether she knew that we — my cousin Mrs. Ricardo and I — meant to call or not. I thought Mrs. Forestier might tell her. But I wasn't surprised not to find her at home."

"You didn't take that for a sign that — er — a visit would not be welcome to her?"

"Oh, not at all. We had been far too good friends for that, in the past. And there can never be a past in real friendship."

"Were you going away when the footman told you Lady Hereward was out?"

"I was."

"Did Sir Ian's arrival stop you?"

"Yes."

"Did he seem to you to be perfectly calm when he appeared?"

Terry's face did not change at all as she answered; "Perfectly." But her heart gave a great throb. It was fortunate for her, again, that the question had shaped itself so, for it would have been harder to answer,

except for the last three words "when he appeared." It was true that he had seemed calm then. If not, she knew she would have perjured herself and become a false witness rather than bring a new trouble worse than the first upon him. Terry Ricardo, whose father had been half Italian, half English, had had a wholly American mother, and she was loyal in every beat of her blood, but she could not help remembering several things. She remembered how Ian had stammered when he spoke of parting from his wife in the woods. Not only had he betrayed painful embarrassment, but a deep distress. She had then attributed it to some kind of late-springing remorse for the past, though it had seemed intense beyond all reason, but now — why, still she attributed it to that!

"Oh, God, Terry!" he had cried to her; and she had hushed him back to conventionality. If only she could stop seeing his eyes as they had looked then, hearing his voice as it had sounded then!

But her thoughts would escape control and buzz round the forbidden subject as moths rush to the flame of a lighted candle.

"How did Sir Ian explain his wife's absence?"

This was a little harder, but Terry did not flinch.

"I believe he said that she wanted to linger in the woods for a little while, but he thought she wouldn't be long; and I had the impression that he fancied she

might have gone to the village, when in the end she didn't come home."

So it went on; question after question; answer after answer; pens scratching; notes going down on paper at the coroner's table, and journalists writing swiftly, perhaps some of them secretly sketching. But the worst was over. Terry felt that she had acquitted herself well; that if suspicion had been creeping into people's minds, she had perhaps been able to catch the ugly little snake by its tail, and crush it before it could grow to formidable size.

"I am glad — glad — glad," she said to herself, "if I have been able to help Ian."

She believed in him; believed him to be honourable as he was brave (though once long ago he had failed in highest honour to her); believed that he had adored his wife. And yet — Terry had grown in the last two days to hate these words "and yet."

She walked quietly and steadily back to her place beside Maud; but no sooner had she sat down than she began to feel sick and faint. The room whirled before her eyes. The coroner's table and the men seated on either side seemed to rise from the ground and float up toward the ceiling, in a bluish haze. Major Smedley's face turned into that of a Cheshire cat, with great cold eyes like enormous agates looking at her, staring at her.

If it had not been for those eyes and their stare she

probably would have fainted; but the malice in them was like a douche of cold water. If she fainted, all she had said might go for nothing. People, seeing her emotion, would misread it. They would think she had lied to save Sir Ian. And she hadn't lied, hadn't lied. She would have lied, perhaps, but it hadn't been necessary.

Maud slipped a tiny bottle of smelling salts into Terry's hand, but she would not use it. By and by she grew better. Some one came to ask, politely, if she and all the other women witnesses would prefer to go out before the farmer, Thomas Barnard, and the doctors, should be called, for details unpleasant to the fastidious feminine ear were apparently expected to come out. There would be talk of blood and other disagreeables.

Suddenly it occurred to Miss Ricardo that Miss Verney had not yet been called; and this somewhat surprised her.

CHAPTER XIV

MAUD read *The Morning* eagerly next day. She wanted to see how Sir Ian's and Terry's evidence would look in print; what the witnesses had said, after she and Terry had left Friars' Moat; and whether anything new had been discovered since yesterday.

"Oh, the inquest is adjourned. So *that's* what happened!" she exclaimed aloud to Miss Ricardo; for they were breakfasting together when the paper came. "Lots of perfectly *horrid* details of the murder itself — just the sort of things poor Milly would hate to have people saying about her. I don't know if you'd care to read them, or if you'd rather not?"

Terry felt cold in the sunny warmth of the day, but she answered that she wished to read everything. She did not explain that she longed to find some bit of evidence which would free Sir Ian from suspicion forever, even if it did not clear up the mystery; but in truth that was her feeling.

Presently she read what Tom Barnard had to say. He was questioned more minutely than Sir Ian had been on the appearance of the body, and the room in which it was found. He described the Tower, and the iron staircase which ran round outside, with a balcony

landing on each of the three stories above the ground floor. He mentioned the four rooms, one on each floor, and the locked door which led to each room from the staircase. He said that it was one of his duties to visit the Tower from time to time, to see if repairs were needed, and to make sure that no tramps had broken in. Seven years before, when he first came to the Home Farm, the Tower had been left unlocked, as there was nothing of value in it; but it was discovered that tramps were sleeping there, and since those days, keys had been made. Barnard was in the habit of inspecting the Tower once every month or six weeks, and had made his last call only ten or twelve days before the murder. Everything had been right then, the doors locked, and no sign that any one had been inside. On the day of the murder, when he was summoned to go to Sir Ian, he had seen the door of the room on the ground floor standing open. At first he had not thought of examining the lock, but later he had done so, and found that it was unbroken. Therefore a key which fitted it must have been used, by whom he could not guess. He knew only that his own key was at the farm, in its usual place. He would not swear that his key might not have been, at some time or other, taken from that place, and copied; but if so, he had no idea when, or by whom. He did not know any one who might have wished, for any reason whatever, to get into the Tower. There was very little

furniture there. In the ground-floor room, a table, and four chairs of a simple and cheap description, brought there many years ago: a rough dresser, with glass doors behind which a tea-set, also simple and cheap, was kept; and in each of the other rooms, nothing more than a chair and a wooden bench; with the exception of the top room of all, which had, in addition to a chair, a desk such as school children use, and an old couch. Most of these things had been placed there by Mr. Forestier in his youth, so Barnard understood; but in his opinion there was no temptation to enter the Tower except for those who wished to see a fine view: unless it were for tramps; and as he had said, he had found no trace of occupation when he searched the rooms a few minutes after seeing the dead body of Lady Hereward.

Tom told how he had noticed her ladyship's gloves folded, or rather rolled neatly up together, lying on the table with her empty bead bag, and explained how in his opinion this proved that she had entered the room quietly, before dreaming of any cause for fear. But it was Doctor Unwin who had most to say about the appearance of Lady Hereward's body.

He deposed that, when he arrived at the Tower toward six o'clock, she had certainly been dead for some time, probably about two hours. The unfortunate lady had been fatally wounded in the throat, by a bullet undoubtedly fired from a revolver of small

calibre. Another shot had been fired, but with such deficient aim as to glance off from a whalebone on the left side of a very heavily boned French corset, inflicting no wound, though the dress was cut, and the flesh underneath slightly bruised. When asked if the wound in the throat could have been self-inflicted, the doctor thought probably not, and a colleague who had been called later to view the body, agreed with him on this point. It would be barely possibly, perhaps, for a woman to commit suicide by shooting herself in the left side of the throat, an inch above the collar bone, or clavicle; but it was practically out of the question that she would do so. The natural thing was to aim at the breast, in the hope of reaching the heart; or at the temple; or occasionally a would-be suicide pushed a revolver into the mouth.

The most reasonable hypothesis was that Lady Hereward had been shot by a person who aimed at her as she stood, partly turned from him, unaware of his presence near her. The expression of horror frozen on her dead face might be accounted for by the fact that she had not died immediately after falling, but had remained conscious, and had seen the assassin bending over her. The eyes being open and raised would tend to bear out this supposition, and would seem to show, also, that she had not caught sight of her murderer before the shots were fired. Had he not hidden himself, and aimed at her from a place of

concealment (very likely behind the open door), Lady Hereward's eyes would presumably have been closed, in horror of the danger she saw menacing her. But if she had been shot at from the side by a person using the door as a screen, and if she had fallen before the murderer showed himself, she would have died staring up, horror-stricken, into the assassin's face.

Following the medical men, the superintendent of police and the constable who had accompanied Doctor Unwin to the Tower, were called. Their evidence went to substantiate the theory of the surgeon, that the two shots must have been fired from behind the door, probably just after Lady Hereward — surprised at seeing the door open — had entered the room, and laid her bag and folded gloves carefully on the table. In order to put down the gloves in the place where they were found, she might have stood in just such a position as to receive the bullet in the left side of the throat, especially if she had turned slightly, after the first shot grazed her side. Also, the table was near enough to the door to account for the blackening of the skin, which showed that the weapon had been aimed at close quarters.

The police evidence having been taken, and Major Smedley called as witness, some information had reached the coroner from outside, which caused him immediately to adjourn the inquest for two days; and the general impression was that startling developments

might be expected at any moment. The rumour ran that an arrest had been made, or was likely to be made; but it was no more than a rumour, as the coroner and the police were extremely reticent.

If they refused to enlighten the public, however, the correspondent of *The Morning* was ready to do his best to satisfy the curiosity of readers. Not only did he give a graphic account of all that had happened at the inquest, describing the principal witnesses, but he added, for what they might be worth, the theories he heard put forward in the neighbourhood. He announced that the eyes of Lady Hereward would be examined by a great expert in the hope of finding "photographed on her retina the image of her assassin." He believed that the bloodhounds employed in the search for clues to the mystery had come upon some important piece of evidence; though whether it was the missing revolver which they had brought to light, or some other trace of the murderer in his flight from justice, was not yet known. The theory of the police (according to the newspaper correspondent) was against robbery as the true motive of the crime, although several rings and other valuable articles of jewelry, as well as a sum of money, had undoubtedly been stolen, presumably as a blind. It seemed to be generally thought that Lady Hereward had had a special reason for wishing to be left alone in the neighbourhood of the Tower, though certain signs made it seem not so clear

that she had originally planned to enter the Tower herself. It was supposed that she might have made an appointment to meet some one who, perhaps, had written begging for charity, or a hearing for some pitiful story, from the well-known Lady Bountiful. There were other theories, of course, the journalist went on to say, some of them extraordinarily sensational in character; but these were the suppositions most in favour; and the murderer was almost certainly no common thief. If Lady Hereward had not been so greatly loved for her generosity and kindness of heart, it might be taken almost for granted that this vindictive crime was one of revenge for some fancied injury; but it was difficult to believe that any man could have imagined himself aggrieved by so gentle a lady.

"What do you think of it all?" asked Maud Ricardo, when Terry put down the paper. "And why do you suppose they suddenly adjourned the inquest?"

"I don't know what to think," Terry answered, helplessly. And if she had a secret supposition of her own, Maud was one of the last persons to whom she would have confided it.

"If only Sir Ian hadn't been such an angel to Milly, of course people would be saying ——"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Terry.

"I wouldn't, to any one else but you," Maud excused herself.

"Not even to me." She had nearly said, "Not to me, of all people."

"Well, I can't help feeling that if your evidence had been different ——"

"It couldn't have been different," Miss Ricardo cut her short.

"Why, no, I suppose not, or you wouldn't have given it," Maud said, glancing at the other with a kind of childlike slyness, from under her long eyelashes. "Strange, how we were speaking of Major Smedley before we knew that Milly was — dead. And then, that he should have come down."

"Wicked old busybody!" Terry could not help exclaiming.

"You believe he volunteered his evidence just to get himself mixed up with a *cause célèbre*."

"Of course. And in the hope of doing Ian — Sir Ian — harm, in some way or other. When he saw that I was in the room, he thought of a way." Terry spoke half to herself.

"Has he a grudge against Ian?" All Maud's curiosity was awake.

"Oh, merely the grudge he has against every man who isn't a coward. Cowards are civil to him, because they're afraid of what he may do or say, just as people fear a vicious cat. Men and women who aren't cowards can't be civil to creatures like that. It only encourages them in their blackmailing career."

"I suppose, then," said Maud thoughtfully, "that *you* weren't nice to him in India."

"No, I was as horrid as I knew how to be. I dare say I kept him from being asked to a few houses where he would have liked to go. And naturally he was never asked to ours, as I was mistress of it socially in those days."

"That explains things!"

"Yes. That explains things."

"He's remembered, all these years."

"He wouldn't be Major Smedley if he hadn't."

"Fancy!" murmured Maud. "As soon as he got into the room, he sent a scrap of paper to the coroner, suggesting things about your having been engaged to Ian. Then all those men consulted a lot, and at last decided to question you. He did it to put hateful ideas in their heads, and he would have quite succeeded, if you hadn't been too clever for him."

"Don't call it clever," Terry protested, almost irritably. "It's not clever to tell the truth."

"The clever thing is to tell the truth in the right way," Maud argued subtly, with another of her long-lashed glances. "And you did — quite wonderfully. You turned the tide for Ian — and you were so quiet about it, too! It was your manner as much as your words that did the trick."

"Oh, Maud, you make me almost *hate* you, when you use such expressions!" Terry broke out, her nerves

tried beyond self-control. "I wonder if you do it on purpose?"

"That's your quick-tempered American mother," said Maud. "If I'm slangy I've learnt it from Norman. I'm awfully imitative without meaning it, you know. And I seem to feel what people are thinking about, in the most curious way, when I'm excited. It's like telepathy — or the way a blotting-pad absorbs ink. I *felt* how your testimony turned the tide of suspicion which had begun to set in against Ian, after that curious exhibition of his — and the things Milly's maid said — and the questions they began asking you. But, of course, we can't hope that the idea won't be *discussed* — that people won't talk. It would be so dramatic, you know, if ——"

"If what?" Terry asked defiantly.

"You said 'don't, even to you', when I first wanted to discuss it."

The blood rushed to Terry Ricardo's face. "How can you, Maud?" she cried. "When he has been your friend for years."

"I'm doing nothing, saying nothing, and believing nothing against him," Mrs. Ricardo defended herself, vexed with her companion. "I'm only glancing at what other people will say — for they will, you know. One might as well look facts in the face. At least, I should think that would be *your* way, as you pride yourself on your courage — which *I* don't, at all.

There's no use disguising it; Ian Hereward will have to stand some disagreeable gossip, as well as Ian Barr."

"I hope to heaven it may never reach his ears," ejaculated Terry.

"Probably that's just what Nora Verney is wishing for Ian Barr. But neither of your wishes will be granted. It's rather queer, isn't it? — in this case there are three young women, outside it, as far as they themselves are concerned, yet each trying to protect a man from being suspected. You; Nora Verney; and Milly's maid, Craigie; though, of course, those two girls may *not* be entirely outside the case themselves, as you are."

"What do you mean?" asked Terry.

"I hardly know. But you can never quite tell, in an awful affair like this, how evidence may turn. Craigie's testimony simply *gave it away* that she didn't like her mistress, though I don't suppose the woman fully realized what she was saying either about herself or that lover of hers. As for Miss Verney ——"

"She hasn't even given her evidence yet," broke in Terry, impelled to defend the beautiful girl who was so unhappy.

"No. But wait till they go on with the inquest. There's evidently a mystery about that adjournment. They've found out something, and have got to wait to find out something more. Which one is it going to concern, do you feel, Terry? Sir Ian Hereward;

or Ian Barr; or Edward the footman? Or some stranger?"

"I feel nothing," Terry answered.

Which was true only if to have a lump of ice instead of a heart, were to feel nothing.

And Terry's breakfast had consisted of no more than a few sips of tea, and a crumb or two of toast. But Maud was far too deeply absorbed in the exciting puzzle she was setting for herself, to notice her guest's lack of appetite, since her own was good.

CHAPTER XV

THE next day the secret was out. The inquest had been adjourned because there was new evidence During the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Barnard from the Home Farm, at Friars' Moat, a detective had interviewed their daughter Margaret (left in the care of a neighbour), and had picked up information of such importance that the child had to be summoned as witness. Mrs. Barnard was recalled, and her little girl was minutely questioned as to the conversation which had taken place in her presence between her mother and Kate Craigie, Lady Hereward's maid.

Who would have dreamed that a tiny being, scarcely more than a baby (in a mother's eyes, at least), would notice so much, and remember so many details of talk between grown-up people? Other mothers, on hearing the story of Poppet, took the affair as a warning not to talk before their children, and recalled the adage, "little pitchers have large ears." Some of Kate Craigie's friends said that Poppet was a sly young minx. But Poppet was not a minx, and so far from being sly, she was almost embarrassingly honest when she spoke out her childish thoughts. She was, however, a reserved, as well as a thoughtful, little

girl, who kept things to herself, and brooded upon them, unless questions drew forth her small opinions and ponderings.

In her memory she had stored several rather odd sayings of Kate's, and when a very nice man came to the house, appearing to be surprised that her mother was out, Poppet was far too polite not to answer his questions. She had often been told not to ask too many questions herself, because speech was silver, while silence was golden; and little girls should be seen and not heard. But nobody had ever suggested that a "grown-up" had not a right to put as many queries as he pleased, and to have them answered.

Besides, the man was a particularly kind, agreeable "grown-up." He happened to have a beautiful picture-book in one pocket, and a small box of wonderful sweets from London, in another. Both of these, he said, should be for Poppet, if she were a good girl, and talked to him prettily.

So Poppet talked as prettily as she knew how; and by the time the book and the box were earned, the kind man knew that Kate Craigie had said horrid things about Lady Hereward — poor Lady Hereward, whom (Poppet had been informed) she would never, never see any more. Kate had told Poppet's mother that she would like to shake Lady Hereward, and box her ears, because she was always saying how much better the vanished Liane was than any other

maid ever could, would, or should be. And Kate had mentioned to Mrs. Barnard that Edward the footman "hated her ladyship" and often felt as if he could do her a mischief, because she tried to make Kate think he was too far beneath her to make a good husband.

During the adjourned inquest, Kate was recalled, on the strength of this evidence, and, for her lover, made a far worse witness than she had made the other day. She stammered, and contradicted herself, and drew attention ostentatiously to the fact that Miss Verney had been in the woods, near the Tower, not so very long before Lady Hereward was shot, "looking ready to die of fear, or shame, or something." And before Kate could be interrupted and forbidden to touch upon a subject irrelevant to her evidence, she had blurted out the gossip about "Mr. Ian Barr having been seen in the neighbourhood on the day of the murder."

Of course, the coroner and the policemen from Scotland Yard and the neighbourhood already knew perfectly well what the gossip was; but either they could not prove the truth of it, or else they had not been able to lay hands upon Mr. Barr, for he was not among the witnesses summoned to testify at Friars' Moat. Nevertheless, Kate's words, spoken desperately when she was at bay in defence of her lover and herself, probably did some harm to Ian Barr in the minds of jury and journalists, while Edward's statement,

later, though rambling and practically valueless, did more.

Major Smedley had his chance to give evidence, at last, and got himself thoroughly disliked by everyone present for trying (or apparently trying) to damage the character of Sir Ian Hereward. He said that he was an old friend of the Latham family, that he had known Lady Hereward before her marriage, and her husband both before and afterward, "more or less well," and that there was a "mystery about their coming together." Her people had never thought that he loved her. There was some other reason for the marriage. Sir Ian (then Captain) Hereward had had at least one desperate love affair in India, just before his sudden engagement to his distant cousin, Miss Latham; and people who had known him before he was ordered home to England said that he had never been the same man since. Altogether, if Miss Ricardo were right in believing that Major Smedley had a bone to pick with Sir Ian Hereward, he certainly picked it clean. To all appearances, he produced little or no impression on the minds of the jury, but such insinuations as he made under cloak of answering straightforward questions, could not easily be forgotten, especially when repeated far and wide in the newspapers.

Miss Verney, pale as if she were ready for her coffin (like her dead mistress upstairs), but exceedingly lovely to look upon, denied on oath that she had gone out to

meet Ian Barr in the woods on the afternoon of the murder, or that she had met him. And the person who had started the story that the young man had been seen on that day could not be unearthed. Inquiries at the railway-station had drawn blanks; and Miss Verney professed not to know where Ian Barr was at the present moment, though she admitted that, for a short time, she had been engaged to him, and that they still wrote to each other occasionally. Beyond this she would admit nothing, and she gave her answers like a mechanical doll. She swore that the breaking of her engagement was not due to Lady Hereward's expressed wish, but to "private reasons." She vowed that, as far as she knew, Lady Hereward had not made things so unpleasant for Mr. Barr that he had resigned his stewardship, nor had the lady forbidden him to visit his fiancée under her roof. There was not, she said, a word of truth in the stupid story that Ian Barr had disliked Lady Hereward. He wished to leave Friars' Moat because he hoped to better his position, in order to marry; and he preferred to make a home in some distant place where his parentage was not a matter of gossip. But there were those in the room, among others Mr. Samways, the coroner, and several members of the jury, who thought that beautiful, pale Miss Verney did not look as if she were telling the truth, or at all events the whole truth. To their searching eyes, she had the air of a culprit, rather than that of a

straightforward witness, with no secret knowledge to keep back. And though few people had the heart to blame the girl if she dared risk her soul by perjury for her lover's sake, nevertheless, after her evidence had been taken, many persons were more than ever inclined to believe that Ian Barr had good reasons for keeping out of the way.

Sir Ian, summoned to testify again, to a certain extent confirmed the statements of Miss Verney, though his well-remembered hesitations suggested a different opinion. If his wife had disapproved of Mr. Barr, she had not asked her husband to discharge the young man. Mr. Barr had resigned his stewardship quite of his own accord, rather against Sir Ian's advice than in accordance with it. However, he had gone, on very short notice, and Sir Ian had heard nothing of him since, except that once, several weeks ago, on speaking to Miss Verney of Mr. Barr, she had mentioned that he had some idea of sailing for America. Then Sir Ian went on to state that he had always had the highest respect for the young man's character; that Barr had behaved extremely well, on the whole, in exceptionally trying circumstances, and if he had a fiery temper, Sir Ian had never seen any disagreeable exhibition of it.

Again, on the second day, matters did not appear to be much further advanced, after all, than they had been before, and once more the inquest was adjourned,

this time for a fortnight. The dark curtain of mystery had not been lifted an inch when the day came for the murdered Lady Hereward to go to the family vault in Riding St. Mary Church.

A few intimate friends, who desired it, were allowed to bid her a last farewell before her coffin was fastened down, and those who did said that never had they seen her so young and fair and sweet as she appeared pillowed on her favourite white roses. The expression of horror had faded from her face; the pearly flower-petals and green leaves hid the wound in her neck; and she was dressed, not in a stiffly made garment suggestive of death, but in a filmy tea-gown of white chiffon which she had brought home from Paris, the day before she died. People whispered it about that with hands clasped lightly over a loose bunch of roses (she had been vain of her beautiful hands) and the half-smile into which her lips had mercifully relaxed, she was like a statue whose name might be "Mystery."

If only the dead lips could have spoken, just once! But it seemed, so those who saw her said, as if she rejoiced in her silence, as if she would not speak if she could. And since no more was heard about the experiment which was to be tried upon her eyes, the world which talked of her constantly took it for granted either that it had failed, or that the experts had decided it would be useless, for some reason, to attempt it.

So she went to the old, old vault in the old, old church where many generations of Herewards lay; but perhaps none of the name had ever taken with them into the grave such a secret as hers. A word from her would have freed two men, at least, out of three, of suspicion, and perhaps a woman. For Kate Craigie was under that ban as well as her lover now, thanks to her freedom of speech before Poppet. She could not have killed Lady Hereward, since she had been sitting with Mrs. Barnard when the shots in the woods were fired; but she might — so thought some people — have been expecting those shots, because she had encouraged Edward to pay a grudge of hers as well as his own.

Meanwhile, Scotland Yard was busy, in a quiet way. Nobody knew exactly what the police were about, or what clues had been found; but in spite of *The Morning's* correspondent, it soon began to be rumoured that the exhaustive search of the woods had, after all, resulted in disappointment. The blood-hounds had followed several trails, but they had been misleading ones, or at best had ended in mystery as impenetrable as the thick bracken in the forest. The revolver with which Lady Hereward had been shot was not forthcoming, though it was hunted for with skill and diligence; and no traces of the murderer were visible in the Tower, notwithstanding the fact that a clever detective had examined each of the four rooms,

inch by inch. Still, the police were undiscouraged, and though the journalists were certainly not in the confidence of Scotland Yard, each day paragraphs appeared in the newspapers hinting that the murderer was being tracked down, and that "an arrest was imminent."

"Why does not Mr. Ian Barr come forward?" asked one morning paper, in a big black headline; and it was a question which repeated itself in every town and every county of England. But Mr. Barr did not come forward. And when the murder of Lady Hereward was a week old, some other great sensation claimed the most important column of the morning papers, which up till then had been filled by the latest news of the latest theories in the "Tower Mystery"; and the tragedy of Riding Wood had second place for a few days.

CHAPTER XVI

THE day of Lady Hereward's death, the wife of the vicar at Riding St. Mary invited Miss Verney to make her a short visit. Those were the exact words used: a "short visit."

It was not *comme il faut* that a girl like Nora Verney should remain in the house alone with a comparatively young man, like Sir Ian Hereward, now that her "occupation was gone," and the lady, whose paid companion the girl had been, was dead.

Mrs. Haynes was a kind, if extremely conventional woman; but she was middle-aged, and looked years older than her slim, attractive husband the vicar, who was almost too soft-hearted where women were concerned; and naturally it was not expedient to keep such a beauty as Miss Verney too long under the same roof with such an admirer of beauty. Nora knew from the beginning that she could not remain many days at the vicarage, even if she wished to do so, which she did not. And after the second inquest, she could not help noticing a difference in her hostess's manner. Who would like to have as a guest a young person about whom all the world was talking, and at least half the world blaming?

Nora knew as well as if she had been told, how people were asking Mrs. Haynes, in lowered tones: "Hasn't she said anything even to *you?*" "Don't you think she really knows where Ian Barr is?" "Do you suppose he was with her in the woods that day?" and "How awful if a clergyman's daughter should have borne false witness!"

The girl did not want to stay in the vicarage of Riding St. Mary, and did not mean to stay. But — she did not know where to go, or what to do. She guessed, even though no one had said such a thing to her, that, to a certain extent, she was under surveillance. She was supposed to be aware of Ian Barr's whereabouts, and wherever she went she would be watched by the police. She had very little money, because she had been using most of her very generous salary as Lady Hereward's companion, to pay off some debts of her dead father's; yet she was determined not to accept any, if offers of charity should be made to her. As for finding another situation, in the present position of affairs, it would be almost impossible. Nobody, or at least "nobody nice," as Nora put it to herself, would want to employ a girl who had had such notoriety thrust upon her. Even if people did not believe that she had perjured herself, they would scarcely like to take "that Miss Verney of the Hereward murder case" as a companion for themselves, or a nursery governess for their children.

"Nobody would have me, even for a servant," she thought. "And I should be a very stupid servant, anyhow, just to begin with."

By and by happy days might come, even to her, but there was no chance of happiness now, or for a long, long time, if ever.

One day, soon after Lady Hereward's funeral (to which she had not gone), Nora Verney was in her room at the vicarage, when Mrs. Haynes sent up a servant with a message. Would Miss Verney kindly come down to the drawing-room at once?

Miss Verney went, and found Sir Ian Hereward with her hostess.

The girl hung back in the doorway, her flower-like complexion betraying her distress. She looked like a hunted thing, wondering where to find a hiding-place.

"Come in, Miss Verney," said Mrs. Haynes, rising and drawing her guest into the room. "Sir Ian and I have been having a long talk about you. I have told him that my husband and I are delighted to have you with us, while you are looking about, but he ——"

"Oh, I am going away in a day or two, thank you," Nora said hurriedly. "You've been most kind, you and Mr. Haynes, but I must go up to London ——"

"I don't think that will do, Miss Verney," cut in Sir Ian. "You have no friends in London, have you?"

"I can apply to an agency," replied Nora, very cold and white.

"My wife wouldn't have liked you to do that," Sir Ian said kindly. "And I shouldn't like it, either. I am going abroad," he added, "and I couldn't leave Friars' Moat without trying to arrange something for your future — something of which my wife would have approved."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nora, and then broke off, biting her lip, her large eyes full of tears. "I — I would rather not have — *anybody* arrange anything for me," she stammered on.

Mrs. Haynes was somewhat surprised at the girl's manner. She had always found Miss Verney most gentle, most amenable; and now, instead of being grateful to Sir Ian for the interest he took in her, despite his horrible trouble, she seemed almost to resent his having come to inquire and to plan for her welfare.

"I will just run away and leave you to discuss things together," suggested the vicar's wife, with the spasmodic cheerfulness rather irritatingly characteristic of her.

"No!" implored Nora. But Mrs. Haynes looked at the girl reproachfully, raising her eyebrows, and went out, with a slight warning shake of her incredibly sleek head.

Nora was left alone with Sir Ian. It was the first

time they had seen each other since the murder of Lady Hereward, except at the inquest.

The girl had not sat down, but stood with her eyes fixed on the ground, as if she did not wish to meet Sir Ian's. They were fixed upon her sadly, for he was thinking how different she had been when first she had come to live at Friars' Moat.

"Won't you sit down and talk to me — or rather, let me talk to you?" he asked.

Nora shook her head, still not looking up. "I like standing," she said.

"How changed you are!" he could not help exclaiming.

"Yes," she admitted.

"What a cruel thing it seems that other people's sorrows should trouble your life! But thank Heaven, you're young. You will forget before long — when you begin to lead your own life."

The girl did not answer, but from under the downcast lashes two tears rolled.

"Poor child!" said Sir Ian. "I haven't come to question you, about anything — or any one — you don't want to speak of. But I have had you very much on my mind since — for the last few days."

"You need not," Nora protested.

"I should be a strange man if I hadn't," he said. "My wife was fond of you. Perhaps you didn't

think so, lately; but she was — in her way, very fond of you. She didn't mean to be cruel, ever."

"I have no hard thoughts of her. On the contrary ——" But Miss Verney could not go on.

"I know what you would like to say, I think," said Sir Ian, very gently. "She left no will, but if she had dreamed that — she might go suddenly, she would have wished to leave a legacy to you. You must let me ——"

Suddenly the girl looked up, her blue eyes dark and bright. "Don't!" she broke out. "Don't, Sir Ian. It's no use. I couldn't possibly take one penny from you."

"It wouldn't be from me," he argued. "She ——"

"All the same, I can't take it," Nora repeated.

"But let me persuade you ——"

"I tell you I would rather die!"

He stared at her in pained amazement. She looked hard and desperate. He had never seen the beautiful young creature in such a mood. But she had gone through a great deal. No wonder her nerves were strained almost to the breaking point.

"You used to like and trust me a little, I thought," he said.

"*Used!* Oh, Sir Ian, please go, and leave me, before I say anything which I shall regret all my life — and you will regret too."

He looked at the girl strangely, in silence. Then,

a light as of comprehension, flashed into his eyes, and his face reddened deeply.

"Good-bye, Miss Verney," he said. And as if on a sudden thought, he held out his hand. "If I come back here it will be only for the inquest. Otherwise I may be gone a long time. Will you shake hands?"

Impulsively, she put both hers behind her, twisting the small, cold fingers together. Then, turning her shoulder to him, she covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

Without another word, Sir Ian went out, and shut the door behind him. He had forgotten all about his hostess, and would have left the house without seeing her, if she had not caught sight of him, passing the half-open door of the study where she sat with her husband. Instantly she pounced upon him, with the beaming smile which was intended to "cheer him up."

"Well?" she said. "I hope you had a satisfactory little chat with that poor dear child?"

"She is very proud," Sir Ian answered evasively. "I'm afraid none of the ideas I had are of any use. I must think of something else. She's in rather a hard position, just now."

"I wish we had a larger house," sighed Mrs. Haynes.

"It's large enough for that poor, pretty little creature to find shelter as long as she likes——" the vicar began; but his wife hastily cut him short.

"My dear, you *don't* understand," she exclaimed.

"Men can't. We must have several spare rooms, otherwise we could show no other hospitality. Besides as dear Sir Ian says, Miss Verney is proud. I think, if we ask her to stop a week or two longer, it's all we can do in justice to *others*."

"I will arrange something, and let you know at once," said Sir Ian. "But whatever we decide to do, my name must be kept out of the thing. Neither Miss Verney nor any one else must know."

"I quite understand," Mrs. Haynes assured him, wisdom and sympathy beaming from her rather bald looking eyes. "And are you really going to leave us shortly?"

"Almost at once," he said. "I — feel I must go, for a time at all events."

Again Mrs. Haynes quite understood and sympathized. She was sure that a change would do Sir Ian worlds of good, but she hoped that it might not be so very long before he felt able to come back to live in his own home and to the friends who had never valued him more than they did to-day.

"I don't know — I don't know," said Sir Ian. "Just now, I feel as if — I could never think of Friars' Moat as home again. But perhaps some time ——" he broke off, and held out his hand. "Good-bye. Good-bye to you both. I will write — about Miss Verney — before night."

Out of doors he walked with his head held high, as

of old, but there was an unseeing look in his eyes. The brown soldier-face was leaner, and less brown than it had been a week ago. Certainly he needed a change.

The vicarage was on the outskirts of the village, far back from the road. A brook ran through the meadow into which the gate opened, and before reaching the lawns and gardens which surrounded the pretty, low-built old house, pedestrians and carriages had to cross a rustic bridge. Sir Ian was on foot, and as he neared the bridge, he was obliged to step aside for an approaching victoria. When he saw that Maud Ricardo and Terry were in it, he stood with his hat off, pale and unsmiling.

If he had hoped that the two ladies would pass on with a bow, he must have been disappointed, for Maud stopped her coachman instantly.

"Oh, Sir Ian," she said, "I'm so glad to see you. Have you heard from Norman?"

"Yes," he returned. "He wrote me a good letter. I haven't answered it yet, but I will."

"He won't expect that. No one does expect answers — to such letters. Is it true that you're going away?"

"Yes," said Sir Ian. "I am going."

"Will you be gone many weeks?"

"I don't know," he said. And then his eyes met Terry's, in a long gaze, which seemed to say something which she yearned to understand, yet could not. It

was as if he could not look away; but at last he did. He bent his eyes to the ground, and stood prodding the grass with the ash stick he carried.

"I meant to write before I went," he said. But he did not say which one of the two was to have been the recipient of the letter.

"I — I suppose you wouldn't come and dine — just with Terry and me?" Maud hesitated. "You know how glad we should be if ——"

"You are very good," he answered, with gratitude which struggled against constraint, "but I — can't. I'm not fit — you'll understand. You'll both understand."

"Yes, we understand," said Terry, speaking for the first time, her eyes very gentle and sweet. He looked up at her again, once more with a desperate appeal which she could not interpret. But it so stabbed her heart that she would not let him go with his message to her unread and unanswered. "Is there nothing I — we — can do for you?" she asked, stammering a little, for perhaps it would seem to him a strange question.

"Thank you many times, no," he began, but stopped on a sudden thought. "Yes, there is one thing you could both do, if you would," he went on. "I've just been to see Miss Verney at the vicarage. If you could interest yourselves in her — if you could try to find her a home — a situation of some sort, it would

be more than kind — to me, as well as to her. You see, she is all alone in the world, and ——"

"Isn't she — I thought at one time she was engaged to Mr. Barr," ventured Maud, unable to restrain her curiosity.

Sir Ian's face stiffened. "I am not in her confidence," he said. "In any case, that can't help her much now."

Terry was furious to find herself blushing. A strange, new thought sprang into her mind. Could it be possible that Sir Ian cared for Nora Verney more than he wished any one to know?

The instant after this thought had bored its sharp gimlet-point into her brain, it began to seem not so strange. After all, what more natural? Such things came to pass every day. Miss Verney was young, and beautiful. She had lived in the same house with Sir Ian for months. He had begun by being sorry for her and admiring her, of course. No normal man could help admiring such a pretty girl. The other day, he had said in answer to a question, "Yes, she is very important, anyhow in this house;" or something like that. Nothing that Terry had known of him in the past prevented her from thinking him fickle — nothing, at least, except a curious, irrepressible instinct which existed in spite of reason, and with nothing to feed upon.

A horrid, unworthy jealousy of the lovely young

girl turned a leaden screw in Terry Ricardo's breast. She hated herself for it; but it was there, and ached dully, with the same grinding ache which had banished all the joy of life and youth from her girlhood. She would conquer it soon, she told herself, and said aloud: "I promise you that Maud and I will do something for Miss Verney. We are on our way now to return a call of Mrs. Haynes, and we will ask for Miss Verney."

"She may refuse to see you," said Sir Ian, anxiously.

"I won't take no for an answer," Terry assured him, accepting the responsibility for herself alone, whatever Maud might do. "I promise you to be her friend, and not to be discouraged if she doesn't want my friendship at first. I will find a way to get at her, and to help her: trust me to do it."

"I do," he said. And then, impulsively, "You are a very noble woman. I have more than I can ever thank you for."

After that, as if he half regretted, or were ashamed of this outburst, he shook hands with them both hastily, pressing Terry's fingers so hard that her rings ground into them under her gloves; and then walked away with long strides, as if he were hurrying to catch a train.

"Poor Sir Ian, he looks haunted!" exclaimed Maud, when she had told her coachman to drive on.

Terry shivered a little, but did not speak.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he never came back

to live at Friars' Moat," Mrs. Ricardo continued, with interest.

Still Terry did not answer.

"I wonder where he will go?" the elder woman pondered aloud.

Terry was looking at the vicarage, which made a pretty picture now, in the midst of its old-fashioned garden. As she looked, Miss Verney came out through a long window, and turned toward the left, not seeing, or not appearing to see, the approaching visitors.

"There she goes now!" exclaimed Maud. "I don't see what we *can* do for her, do you? — unless she'd accept a present of money."

"I don't think she would do that," Terry said. "But I have a plan. It's growing in my mind now. Perhaps I'll ask her to go abroad with me for a little while. Maybe she would like that."

"Go abroad!" Mrs. Ricardo repeated, her eyes very wide. "Why, you have only just come to England. You are visiting me."

"I know," said Terry. "And if I go, I'll come back to you — if you'll have me. But — this horrible thing that has happened seems to have done something odd to my nerves. You said Sir Ian looked 'haunted.' Well, I *feel* haunted. I can't sleep. And I'm such a fool — I look under my bed every night, and into the wardrobe. That isn't like me. I've been thinking

for two or three days that perhaps I might run over to France for a fortnight, until the inquest comes on again. Even that would be a change. Don't you think it would be a good way of keeping my promise to Sir Ian, if I invited Miss Verney to go as my companion? Afterward I would find her something else."

"I should like to go with you myself," sighed Maud, "only I can't, because a dull but rich aunt of Norman's is coming for a visit, and she's the kind that alters her will if you alter your plans."

"I'll broach the subject to Miss Verney to-day," Terry said, as the carriage stopped at the vicarage door.

"Perhaps she won't go," suggested Maud.

"I will get her to go," said Terry.

CHAPTER XVII

Miss Ricardo kept her word.

When Mrs. Haynes heard the plan, she would have bustled out into the garden to search for Nora, but Terry asked if she might go and try to find her. Permission granted, and a hint given as to Miss Verney's favourite lurking place, the quest was soon ended. The girl sat in a little Virginia-creeper covered summer-house overhanging the brook, which formed a boundary for the garden. She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading it. Her lashes lay on her colourless cheeks, but she was not asleep, for as Terry's light step set the fine gravel tinkling she opened her eyes and gave a quick glance about, as if for a way of escape. But it was too late. She was caught, and made the best of it.

The other day — the dreadful day — at Friars' Moat, she had felt Miss Ricardo's charm, in the midst of the misery with which she had been half dazed. The stranger's face had seemed to her then like a star, shining clearly through torn black clouds; still, the girl would have escaped now, if she could. In a moment, however, the same sweet yet powerful influence routed her wild desire to go. Terry sat down on the

wooden bench beside her, and came straight to the point.

"This country is dear and beautiful, and my cousin Norman Ricardo's wife is very kind to me," she said; "but I have gone through so much in the short time I've been here, that I want to change the current of my thoughts. I've made up my mind to go to France for a little while. Will you go with me?"

"To France!" exclaimed the girl, her face lighting up with a sudden glow of joy and surprise. "*I?* Do you mean it?"

"Yes," said Terry. "Would you care to?"

"Better than anything I thought could ever happen to me. Oh, it would be salvation!" replied Nora. "But why should you take me? You hardly know me at all, and ——"

"No, but I should like to." Terry smiled at her, a rather sad but very charming smile. "I'm not in a mood when travelling by myself has attractions. Maud couldn't go with me, even if I wanted her. And to tell the truth, I don't. I'm fond of her, but I want you. I don't quite know how long I shall stop; whether I shall return after coming back for the inquest, nor exactly where I shall go; but there is one place I want to visit — a tiny place. I was there when I was a little girl, and loved it. I've always wanted to see it again, ever since, just as when one is interrupted in the

middle of a delicious dream, one always wants to get back into it again. You know the feeling."

"Oh, yes, so well!" sighed Nora.

"Then come and help me get back into my dream. The tiny place I'm talking about is St. Pierre de Chartreuse. It's in Dauphiné. A kind of fairyland, it seems to me, as I remember it. And if you, too, have a dream-place in France, I'll take you to it."

Nora shook her head. "I've never been out of England. We were always too poor. But to go to France — now, even for a few days! It makes me feel almost alive again, just to think of it."

"Poor child!" said Terry kindly. The dull ache had not left her breast, but her heart was very warm for the girl. She remembered vividly how things could hurt at eighteen, and how life could seem at an end. Not only was she willing to help this young creature for Sir Ian's sake, but for Nora's own sake as well.

"Then there is no place where you would like particularly to go?" she inquired.

The girl's face seemed suddenly to sharpen. "Why do you ask me that?" she wanted to know, almost suspiciously.

An idea jumped into Terry's mind, but she did not look at Miss Verney, though she knew the big turquoise eyes were fastened upon her. She played with a bangle on her wrist, and answered calmly that most people who had not travelled treasured some glittering

spot on the map of their imagination. Paris, for instance ——"

"I should hate to stay in Paris," said Nora, but added quickly, "unless, of course, you wanted to be there."

"I don't," said Terry. "I should hate to stay there as much as you would. Paris is a place to stop in only when you are gay and happy, and want to be amused. You and I both need just now to be near to nature, and away from the things we have been seeing and thinking about."

"Oh, yes, if anything could make me better, it would be that," breathed the girl. "But —" she looked at Terry strangely, as if she tried to read her soul. "I daren't go with you if — unless I'm sure——"

"Sure of what?"

"I hardly know how to say it."

"I think you may say almost anything to me."

"*Almost* anything! But this — why, it is only that, if I go away with you, I mustn't be expected to talk about Friars' Moat or — or ——"

"You needn't," broke in Terry.

"And — that isn't all. If you are asking me to go with you, just because you were a friend of — *hers*, and because you want to please Sir Ian, then I mustn't go on false pretences."

"False pretences?" echoed Terry. "I don't understand."

"How could you? I mean that I — can't be taken for *their sakes*."

"I will take you for your own and mine," Terry answered.

"Then I will go, so thankfully, for as long or as short a time as you like. But no — one more thing. I'm not fit to be with you, because you are a kind of angel, and I — I am a very wicked girl. I think I must be the wickedest that ever lived in this world, and the unhappiest. Now you won't want to take me for my own sake, will you?"

"Yes, I will, just the same," said Terry, smiling the smile that made people love her. "How old are you, my poor little child?"

"Nineteen."

"Not twenty, yet already the wickedest and the unhappiest girl in the world! Well, I'm not afraid of you. I'll risk the wickedness, and try to make you a little happier."

"You don't believe me, Miss Ricardo."

"I believe you think yourself wicked."

"Would *you* think yourself wicked if you had sworn to a lie?"

Terry's pulses quickened a little. She could not help guessing at the girl's meaning, though she would rather not have guessed. She paused before answering, knowing that Nora's eyes were fixed upon her. It was a painful pause, though brief, for all the woman's

early training and convictions warred against her sympathy and pity for a girl sacrificing truth to protect her lover. At last she said, laying her hand on Nora's hand: "I think it would depend a great deal upon circumstances. I hate lies. As a rule they're mean and cowardly, and debase one's moral nature even if they do no harm to anybody but oneself. Yet — there might be exceptions, perhaps. I'm not sure that *I* wouldn't lie, to save a friend. Indeed, I'm afraid I would do it. I'm afraid most women would."

"Oh, thank you for that!" Nora's voice broke, but she caught back a sob. "To hear you say it, is like — like being lifted off the rack. Of course, I've put myself in your power now. But I trust you. I know I can."

"Yes, you can," said Terry. "I believe we shall do each other good, by being together. And Sir Ian ——"

"You're *not* being so good to me, to please him? You said it wasn't just that, didn't you? Because if it were, I simply couldn't accept your kindness, I can't explain why."

The dull ache in Terry's breast was heavier and harder to bear for a moment, at this hint of Miss Verney's, for something seemed to whisper in Terry's ear: "You see: you were right. He does care for her, and she knows it." But the woman's higher nature fought against the jealous pain, and tried to

ignore it. "What is it to me?" she asked herself angrily.

"Sir Ian has nothing to do with it, now," she said, and then began to speak of the journey; when they would start; where they would stop on the way to St. Pierre de Chartreuse; what sort of clothes they would need to take.

"And you must have a salary, you know," she told the girl, "because you will be my companion, and ——"

"No — no!" cried Nora. "I don't want money from you!"

"But you must take it unless you wish me to be very uncomfortable," Terry insisted. "I wouldn't dream of engaging a companion unless I gave her at least three pounds a week. I love to be exacting, and I couldn't be, conscientiously, unless I paid."

They both laughed a little: and when it was settled that they should start for France together the very next day, Terry rose, saying she must go back to the house. Mrs. Ricardo would be ready to say good-bye to Mrs. Haynes by this time. She took the girl's hand and pressed it cordially: then, when she would have released it, Nora clung to her. Evidently there was something she desired, yet dreaded, to say.

"Are you afraid of me again, after all?" Miss Ricardo asked.

"No. But there's a question I — Do you suppose the — the police will let me go out of England?"

"Why, of course they will," Terry assured her. "They would have no right to keep you, even if they wanted to."

"You're sure? You know — you *must* know — they didn't believe what I said at the inquest."

"Granting even that that were so, there's no suspicion against you which gives the police a right to detain you."

"I hoped not. But I haven't dared to ask anybody till now, or mention the subject at all, except to you. It's such a comfort to speak! Still — supposing they should have me watched — even in France. Would they do that?"

"I don't think so," said Terry. "You mean — on account of ——"

"On account of Ian," Nora answered frankly. "My Ian. They want to find him, you know, as — as a witness, because they believe I lied, and perhaps bribed people who saw him, to say they might have been mistaken. That's why they adjourned the inquest again, I'm sure. They think I met him in the woods — that day, and that I'm trying to shield him."

"Possibly some people do think something of the sort," Terry admitted. She did not ask, or even wish to ask, whether the theory were justified or no.

"Yes. And so it came into my head that they might hope to find him through me, if I were watched. They might fancy that — we'd try to meet."

"It seems very probable to me, that if they are anxious to find Mr. Barr, they are looking for him now, and wouldn't wait to try and get at him through you. They would know that you would be very careful — in case, I mean, that there were any reason why he didn't wish to be found."

"There might be reasons which weren't bad ones at all," said Nora, quickly. "Ian is not a coward. I won't let you believe that. He is the bravest and strongest man I ever knew. Look" (with nervous fingers she unfastened two or three buttons of her muslin blouse, and pulled out an open-faced locket, on a thin gold chain) — "that's his portrait. Don't you think he seems worthy of all the love and all the sacrifices a girl could make?"

She held out the locket, and Terry took it in her hand. She had thought a good deal about Ian Barr and his story, trying to call up a picture of the young man and now she looked at his photograph with great interest. Somehow she felt pleased to find that he was not unlike what she had imagined him to be.

He was evidently very dark, with black hair which would have been inclined to curl, had he not kept it cut very short. Black, clearly marked brows were drawn straight and low over the large dark eyes, which, even in the photograph, seemed passionate and full of fire like those of a Spaniard. The face was clean-shaven; the nose fine and aquiline, not unlike Sir Ian

Hereward's, the mouth and chin singularly firm. Ian Barr's Irish mother had had little to give a son except her beauty, and of that she had given much. There was no legacy from the Herewards in the dark, handsome face, except the shape of the nose and the firm set of the jaw.

Teresina Ricardo felt a new stirring of sympathy in her heart for the young man. Sometimes, in spite of herself, she had wished that Ian Barr's guilt could be proved, because in that case his cousin Ian Hereward would be exonerated, freed from the dreadful slavery of suspicion. It was a terrible wish, cruel, and selfish, too, in a way. Terry knew that, and hated it; yet again and again it had come, notwithstanding her interest in Nora Verney and her puzzled pity for the girl. But looking at Ian Barr's picture, in the gold locket warm from the warmth of Nora's bosom, Terry felt the cruel wish exorcised as if it had been a wicked bewitchment. Barr might be guilty; but a man with a face like that would kill only in a moment of blind passion. It was impossible to believe that he could commit a premeditated crime.

"Yes, you are right," she told Nora. "He *is* brave and strong."

"I love him," exclaimed the girl. "And there is nothing I wouldn't do to help him."

CHAPTER XVIII

Sir Ian Hereward had replaced Barr, after the young man resigned his situation and went away, by another steward, a very different sort of person — so different, in fact, that Barr's cook-housekeeper and only servant had not cared to accept an offer to stay on.

This fact made matters rather troublesome for the police, when there arose a reason for finding out things about Mr. Barr and his way of life while steward for his cousin. Miss Maunsell was a peculiar woman, a spinster of more than a certain age, and a dour nature. She was not a native of Surrey, but had come from London to act as Mr. Barr's servant, and had made no friends. How Mr. Barr had got her, whether he had known her before, or had selected her from an agency, nobody could tell. Ian Barr "kept himself to himself," as the saying was. He was sensitive about his position, was too proud to seek friends, or to respond warmly to overtures of friendship; and to his few acquaintances he never talked about his own affairs.

All that could be learned of Miss Maunsell in the neighbourhood, therefore, was that she would not consent to work for the new steward (a nervous,

"finickin" little man), but that she had gone to London the day after Mr. Barr gave up his stewardship. The man in the booking-office at Redeshall, one of the two stations which served Riding St. Mary, remembered selling, on the date of her departure, a third single ticket for Charing Cross to a woman answering the description given of Miss Maunsell; but nobody could be found who remembered seeing her at Charing Cross. This was not surprising, because the elderly spinster was not in any way interesting to look at, nor did she differ very noticeably in face and figure from hundreds of other female holders of third-class tickets who had poured into the great London railway-station that day.

When the police began to be surprised by the elusiveness of the young man whom they had expected to find with ease, their attention naturally turned toward Miss Maunsell, who, besides the master, had been the only inmate of the steward's house. It was thought that she must know a great deal about his habits, and even that she might be able to give some special information that was much wanted. But application was made to all the employment agencies in London and the suburbs in vain; and eventually, after various other means of unearthing the woman had failed, recourse was had to a discreet advertisement in several of the daily papers: "If Miss Sarah Maunsell, lately employed by Mr. Barr, of Surrey,

will apply in person to Messrs. Kipling & Beecher, Solicitors, of Bedford Row, London, W. C., she will learn something to her advantage."

This appeal was repeated for several days before Messrs. Kipling & Beecher heard from Miss Maunsell. At last they received a letter from Harrogate, signed "S. Maunsell," stating that, as the writer was in the position of cook-housekeeper to an invalid, she could not leave her place to visit London. She had just happened to see the advertisement, not being in the habit of looking at the papers every day, and she would be glad to hear from Messrs. Kipling & Beecher.

Scotland Yard was, of course, responsible for the advertisement, but it had not been considered wise to risk alarming the woman, who might have a horror of the police. When the letter arrived, however, a detective from the Criminal Investigation Department was detailed to travel to Harrogate and interview Miss Maunsell. He was an ambitious fellow whose name — Richard Gaylor — was already favourably marked at headquarters, and he was the "nice grown-up" who had beguiled Poppet Barnard. He was about thirty, but did not look more than twenty-one, at most, in face or figure. "Cupid" was his nickname, and it was not inappropriate to the blue-eyed, curly-haired young man, who had deep dimples in pink cheeks, like a girl's.

The address given in Miss Maunsell's cramped and

prim hand-writing was "Care Edwin James, Esq., Hedge House, Aylwin Road, Harrogate," and the detective found the place without difficulty. It was a rather desolate-looking villa, set at some distance from other houses, and it had an air of decayed gentility and "stand-offishness." The high gate was locked, and, having rung, Gaylor was obliged to wait outside in a drizzling rain for some moments. He was just about to pull the old-fashioned bell again when he saw the front door open, and a thin old woman came with mincing steps down the path. The upper half of the gate had a square of lattice, and through this he was able to form some judgment of Miss Maunsell's character (if it were Miss Maunsell who approached) before she opened the gate. She had a high, prominent forehead, tight-drawn, sallow skin, a rat-trap of a mouth, the eyes of an incipient fanatic, and sparse gray hair pulled tightly back in an uncompromising way under a cap like a half-baked bun. Used to face-reading, Gaylor made up his mind in a flash as to the right way of managing the grim old creature.

"Is this Miss Maunsell?" he asked, politely, but not gushingly. To gush at a person of her type would be to court disaster.

"It is," she replied shortly.

"I'm here on the business of Messrs. Kipling & Beecher's advertisement," announced the detective.

If Miss Maunsell felt surprise, she did not show it. "You can come in," she said. Then, being evidently economical of speech, she led the way into the house. It was old-fashioned, but uninteresting. "Gloomy as a sarcophagus," was Gaylor's mental comment as he followed the stiff figure down a narrow corridor to the back of the house. She opened the door of a moderate-sized room like a servants' hall. "My sitting-room," she remarked. "We will not be disturbed, for I am the only servant. Mr. James is a paralytic. Take a seat."

Gaylor obeyed, subsiding upon a hard, high chair by a clumsy dining table. Miss Maunsell sat opposite him, on a chair of the same depressing description.

"What have you got to tell me to my advantage?" she inquired, wasting no time in getting to the point. She had the whining twang suggestive of the cockney, which is characteristic of the lower middle classes in some parts of Yorkshire; and Gaylor made up his mind that the woman had returned to her native county. She had all the hardness of the North at its worst.

"I have to tell you that if you will answer a few questions I've been sent to ask, possibly it may save you from being called as a witness in the second adjourned inquest of the Hereward case, which will come on in a fortnight's time."

"I can't leave my place here to be a witness in any case," rasped Miss Maunsell, "and I wouldn't be of

any use if I could, for I never heard of the Hereward case."

"What! Never heard of the Hereward murder case over a week ago!" exclaimed Gaylor, surprised that a human being could have existed in such cloistered ignorance.

"Are you talking of the Herewards of Friars' Moat?" asked the housekeeper.

"Yes."

"Who was murdered?"

"Lady Hereward. Is it possible you haven't seen in the papers ——"

"Why should I see the papers? 'Tain't likely I'd spend my money on 'em, and Mr. James, my master, cares for nothing but old books, the older the better. I'm no woman to gossip with butcher, baker nor candlestick-maker; and I wouldn't have come across your advertisement if it hadn't stared me in the face, wrapped around a fish. When was her ladyship murdered?"

Gaylor told her.

"Who did it?" was the next question.

"That's what we don't know yet, otherwise I wouldn't be here," said the detective.

"I suppose you don't think *I* did it, do you?" Miss Maunsell demanded with scorn. "Lady Hereward was a Christian woman; that is, if she was as good at heart as what she seemed. But the better she was, the better off she is in the next world."

"If you respected her so much, you'll be all the readier to bring her murderers to justice."

"Not by going as no witness to no trial. My duty is here. Besides, her ladyship was too fond of wearing rich jewelry. She had the name of being charitable, but she'd have done more wisely to sell her precious stones and give the money to missions. Maybe her murder by some thief was a judgment from heaven on her vanity. We all of us have faults, but vanity is a crying sin. And Lady Hereward put powder on her face, and pink paint on her lips. 'Tisn't many would have seen that, perhaps, but my eyes are sharp for such things, though I'm not as young as I was, and I can't abide 'em, on Christian or no Christian. That's all I know about her ladyship, though I was servant to the steward of her husband's estate, so it's no good summoning me. You've got all I can tell out of me now."

"It isn't so much Lady Hereward I'm here to ask you about," said Gaylor, "as Mr. Ian Barr."

"Oh, indeed, do they think he killed her? Well, I'm not surprised. I always thought his temper would be his undoing one of these fine days."

"There's certainly ground for suspicion," replied the detective. "Mr. Barr has disappeared, and so far can't be found."

"Who's trying to find him?" inquired Mr. Barr's late housekeeper. "Those folks that advertised for me, Kipper & Beeching, or whatever their name is?"

"Scotland Yard is trying to find him, and will before long," said Gaylor, thinking to awe the woman; but her face did not change, unless to grow more grim.

"By that do you mean the perlice?"

He bowed, looking about eighteen.

Her thin lips curled. "And are you a policeman?"

"I am a member of the Criminal Investigation Department."

"Why didn't they let you finish going to school?"

"I am nearly thirty," the detective informed her, laughing.

"Hm! I suppose the Kipper & Beeching men were dummies of the police, then?" She was sharp enough, in her way.

"We employ the firm occasionally. But it is in the name of Scotland Yard that I come to question you."

"How am I to know that? You might be anybody, in that gray suit and them brown boots of yours. And anyhow, I consider you got hold of my address on false pretences. You made me think I might be coming in for a legacy. I don't see why I should answer your questions."

Gaylor took from his pocket an important-looking wallet, and produced his credentials.

Miss Maunsell was convinced, though not impressed.

"Well, all I can say is," she remarked, "that Scotland Yard must be hard put to it to find grown-up men. And I don't approve of their methods."

"If you're summoned as a witness a fortnight from now, you will have to go, you know," Gaylor assured her, slyly. "The police have power to subpœna you, and force you to obey if you refuse."

"You can drive a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," said Miss Maunsell, with a kind of dreary nonchalance.

"You wouldn't like to go to prison — a respectable Christian woman like you?"

"A good many respectable Christians have been in prison." And the housekeeper cited several famous scriptural examples.

"That's true. But if you went there it would lose you your present place, nor would it help you to get another. And I'm here to save you trouble. That's where your 'advantage' comes in. If you answer freely and truthfully all my questions, the chances are I may get you off from being called. Besides, your conscience can't counsel you to obstruct justice. You believe in the Old Testament, I'm sure: 'An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth.'"

"I'll hear your questions, and if I think right, I'll answer them," replied the woman, after a moment's reflection. "If I *don't* think right, I'll go to prison for twenty years rather than speak. So there you have my mind."

Gaylor believed that not only did she mean what she said, but would stick to it "through thick and thin,"

and perhaps find a fearful joy in martyrdom. He therefore chose his words with care, suiting them tactfully, as he hoped, to the nature with which he had to deal. He began simply, by asking if Miss Maunsell had had any acquaintance with Mr. Barr before entering his service. Was she by way of being a friend of his family?

"Not I, indeed," she answered scornfully, to the detective's satisfaction. "I didn't know anything about him, until, against my will, I overheard part of a conversation between Mr. Barr and Lady Hereward herself, the day he gave up his stewardship. When I want to get a place I advertise. No agencies for me! Mr. Barr answered my advertisement. I thought the work would suit me; and so it did, as far as that goes, though I can't say I entirely approved of him. In fact, I *didn't*, though he was always what he should be to me, or else I wouldn't have stopped an hour. My initials only were signed to the advertisement, and the same way when I advertised again after leaving him, and got the place here with Mr. James. I stay near Barnes when I'm out of a situation, with an old blind aunt of mine, who's glad enough to have my help when she can get it, instead of the charity girl off the parish she has when I'm in a job. That's why all your policemen couldn't have found me, if I hadn't been silly enough to be caught by a newspaper trap wrapped round a fish."

Judging from Miss Maunsell's expression when she delivered this statement, she would never taste fish again.

"Were you always on good enough terms with Mr. Barr, in spite of not quite approving his conduct, or did you ever give him a piece of your mind?" inquired the detective, in a friendly way.

"We never had any words," said Miss Maunsell. "And it wasn't so much his conduct I disapproved, as his character. I consider myself something of a judge; and from the first moment I ever set eyes on Mr. Barr, said I to myself, 'Here's a young man might do *anything*, if in a passion.' He had eyes like — like wells of fire, if there could be such things; and when he frowned, his eyebrows, that were drawn straight across his forehead as though by a pointed piece of charcoal, used to come together across the bridge of his nose. I've seen him when he was angry, with his nostrils quivering as if he was a vicious horse."

"Did you often see him like that?" asked the cherubic Mr. Gaylor, more and more interested, more and more glad that he had been sent to Harrogate.

"Well, no," the housekeeper reflected aloud. "I can't say I did. Two or three times, perhaps. Twice in particular. I shall never forget either of *those* occasions."

"I should be very glad if you would tell me about them," the detective suggested, mildly.

"The first time was maybe a month before I left him, when a letter had been delivered to Mr. Barr by hand. I don't know who wrote or sent it. I only know it was brought by a boy I never saw before or after. I opened the door myself. Mr. Barr was just finishing his dinner — about eight o'clock in the evening, it was — and I was busy about the table when I had to answer the knock. The boy said there was no answer wanted, and went away quick, before I had a good look at him; and when I'd handed the envelope to Mr. Barr, I kept on about my business in the dining room, which was the only sitting room he had. I heard him give a kind of exclamation, as if against his will, and I looked up. He'd torn the envelope open in a hurry, as if he'd been expecting the letter, and impatient to find out what was in it. But, my heavens, what a face I saw! I should have been sorry if the writer of the letter had walked into the room! Mr. Barr looked as if he was in a mood to kill at sight. He was livid, and his eyes like live coals. Not a bite more dinner would he eat, though I'd just put on the table a tart he was very fond of. He jumped up, and walked about the room, with the letter in his hand. Once or twice I spoke, and he didn't seem to hear me. But at last he thundered out 'No!' so fiercely that I started; though I will say he appeared to be sorry, and said he didn't mean to be cross. He was a good deal worried about something serious, and didn't want

to be bothered with trifles. I made up my mind to let him alone and not speak, if the sky fell; but a few minutes later, I remember very well, that young woman from Friars' Moat came knocking at the door, asking for Mr. Barr, in her affected-sounding, foreign voice."

"What young woman?" questioned Gaylor, with suppressed eagerness.

"That French maid of Lady Hereward's. I don't recall her name. Something outlandish."

"Did she come often to see Mr. Barr?"

"Not to my knowledge. I saw her only two or three times. But there were other times when I thought I heard her voice in the house. I wouldn't swear to that, though. I never was a woman with an evil tongue against my sex, even foreigners. Mr. Barr says to me, when I first arrived, that he hated gossip, and I told him, so did I. I never exchanged a dozen words with the tradesfolk, and I made no friends. I kept myself to myself, as usual, and that I know was pleasing to Mr. Barr, though it was for my own sake I did it, not for his."

"What about the evening when Lady Hereward's maid came, and found Mr. Barr so angry?"

"All *I* know is, that I told him she wanted him for something important, and he said: 'Let her in.' So I did. And afterward I heard her crying and taking on as no English woman would. By and by he went to the door with her himself, and must have walked

a bit of the way home with her, for it was raining, and he came in very wet, looking more furious than ever. Whether with *her* or not, who can say? I never saw the girl again. And it wasn't many days after that, the butcher's boy, trying to get up a conversation, mentioned that the young woman had vanished, and there was a great to-do up at the big house. Now, you tell me Mr. Barr's disappeared, too."

"He seems to be making himself a bit scarce," facetiously replied the detective. "The story at Riding St. Mary was that he'd been seen on the day of Lady Hereward's murder, not far from the woods where she was killed; but the odd thing is, we can't find out where the story started; and, of course, it may or may not be true. Wherever he is, though, Mr. Barr must know he's wanted, and why. Don't you think that looks a little queer for him? If he has nothing to hide, and no reason to keep out of the way, why doesn't he turn up, or send word where he is? Don't you, as a straightforward woman, feel that?"

"Perhaps," said Miss Maunsell, non-committally. "But Mr. Barr was a queer young man."

"Do you think he was in love with that French maid of Lady Hereward's?"

Miss Maunsell tossed her prim gray head, and replied stiffly that she knew nothing about such things. But the girl, in her opinion, was a designing minx. She had the look of it — and being *that* pleased with her-

self! No doubt Frenchwomen were mostly hussies, and above their places, with their fussed-up hair and their squeezed-in waists.

"Lady Hereward thought there had been a flirtation, anyhow," remarked Gaylor.

"I abominate that word," snapped the spinster. "I don't call it decent. But it's no news to me that her ladyship thought the *worst* of Mr. Barr, for I heard her give him her opinion of him in plain words. I told you I was obliged to listen to a conversation between those two the day Mr. Barr resigned; and that conversation was certainly the cause of his doing so."

"I was going to ask if you knew what terms they were on. Now, if you tell me a few more things of this sort, I may really be able to save you from being summoned as a witness."

"I don't mind repeating as much as I can remember of that conversation," said the old woman, "though I can't recall the exact words. But to explain how I overheard, I must mention that Mr. Barr's house was no more than a cottage, and an inconvenient old cottage, at that. My room was over his sitting and dining-room, and my only way of getting down stairs was to pass through it. A little narrow stairs led down directly into that room, and close by was the kitchen door. Any one talking in a fairly loud voice down stairs, I was bound to hear, up above, if I happened to be there; though mumbling would *not* reach my

ears. Well, after I washed the luncheon things, I used generally to go to my room for a bit of a rest, if there was time, and to get dressed; for you see, Mr. Barr seldom or never had people coming to see him at that time. One day, I'd got off my frock and slipped into a dressing-gown, for a ten minutes' snooze before changing into my afternoon dress, when I heard Mr. Barr come in from out of doors, bringing somebody with him. There was a woman's voice, but as I'd never heard her speak before, I shouldn't have known it was Lady Hereward, if he hadn't called her by name.

"'I have come here to see you because I want to talk to you alone,' says she. Those were the first words I caught, and he answered: 'Come indoors, then, Lady Hereward.' I thought of making it known to them that I was in my room; but it would have been awkward for Mr. Barr, and as he ought to have remembered how it was my habit to be there at that time of day — it was about three o'clock — I said to myself it wasn't likely there'd be any talk between them which they'd mind my hearing. It would only be business that Lady Hereward wanted to discuss, thinks I, with her husband's steward.

"In a few minutes I knew better; but it was too late then. If it would have been awkward calling out at first, it would have been ten times as bad then, for every one concerned.

"'Mr. Barr, I want you to tell me where my maid is,' says her ladyship, sharp and short, mentioning the French girl's name, which I can't pronounce."

"Liane," suggested the detective, who was well primed in every detail of the Hereward case.

"'I can tell you nothing whatever about her,' says Mr. Barr in an angry, surprised voice.

"'You know very well where she is!' says Lady Hereward. And to that Mr. Barr wouldn't make any answer. His keeping silence threw her ladyship into a rage, and it was then she told Mr. Barr exactly what she thought of him. She'd been against Sir Ian engaging him as steward, or having him about the place in any capacity. It was 'most unsuitable,' to her idea, and she'd warned her husband, said she, that it would turn out badly. But he *would* have his way, out of 'mistaken kindness of heart,' and now see the consequences! 'Bad blood will out, like murder!' said her ladyship. Those words I do remember. And little did she dream then she'd be murdered herself! Mr. Barr took that as an insult to his mother, and he just about ordered her ladyship out of the house. 'I'm your husband's servant,' said he, 'but this is my house while I'm in his employ, and no one shall defame my dead mother under my roof while it's still mine.'"

"Did Lady Hereward go when he said that?" inquired the detective, greatly interested in this story, which he could have heard from no other living

person than Ian Barr's housekeeper, save Ian Barr himself.

"Not she. She stopped where she was, and insulted him more. 'Put me out by force, if you choose,' says she. 'You'd be equal to that, I dare say; but unless you do, I won't go till I've finished telling you what I think. You're a villain,' says her ladyship. 'You made that poor French girl love you. Then you turned to another and very likely drove her to death.'"

"'I deny it absolutely,' said Mr. Barr. 'It is shameful that I should be obliged to deny it. Does Sir Ian believe this against me?'

"'I will make him believe,' says my lady. And then she was beginning something about Miss Verney, a young person Mr. Barr was engaged to marry. But that was too much for him. 'Stop!' he shouted. 'I won't stop!' cried her ladyship. 'Very well, then, I'll go, and leave you to babble calumnies to the four walls,' says Mr. Barr — or words like those. And he must have gone instantly, for I didn't hear his voice again. About five minutes afterward a door slammed; so what I supposed was that Lady Hereward waited a bit, thinking he might change his mind and come back, or else she rummaged about to find papers which might explain what had become of the French girl; and then she got discouraged and went away. It was the same day Mr. Barr warned Sir Ian to look for another steward."

"That is most important," said Gaylor, "and you have told the story well; nobody could have done better. You see, I've taken down everything you've said," and he held up his notebook, several pages of which were filled with shorthand jottings. "Now, to trouble you just a bit more, and then I've finished. Do you know whether Mr. Barr had a key to the View Tower in Riding Wood?"

The old woman looked thoughtful. "There was a big key that lay on his desk at one time," she replied. "I don't know what it unlocked, but it certainly wasn't any door in the house. And that's what it was like; a door-key. I noticed it lying on the desk one morning, when I was dusting, and wondered where it came from. It had an old-fashioned sort of shape, yet for all that it seemed to be quite new. It lay there for a bit and then it disappeared again, never to come back. I don't know what Mr. Barr did with it after that."

"How long was this before he gave up the stewardship?" asked Gaylor.

"I can't say exactly, but several weeks at least," returned Miss Maunsell.

The detective took a key from his pocket. (He was not a man to neglect anything.) "Was the key on Mr. Barr's desk at all like this one?" he inquired.

The housekeeper examined it gingerly. "Exactly like, if I remember right," she answered.

Gaylor thanked her, and pocketed the key.

"Was Lady Hereward killed in the Tower?" the woman wanted to know.

"Yes," said the detective.

"That looks rather queer against Mr. Barr, hating her as he did," Miss Maunsell reflected aloud. "Well, well, if he has committed a murder, the sooner it's brought home to him the better, say I. I wouldn't put out my hand to save a brother, if I had one, from justice, so be that he was guilty."

"Had Barr a revolver?" Gaylor asked.

"Oh, yes; he used to keep it in a drawer of his writing desk. Not that I was one to pry; but he didn't try to hide the thing. Sometimes the drawer was left half open, and I couldn't help seeing what was in it, when I was putting the room to rights."

At this, the detective produced a small, new revolver. It had been obtained for this very purpose; that it might be shown to the late housekeeper of Ian Barr. The bullet which had killed Lady Hereward had been extracted from her dead body, and another exactly like it had been found embedded in the wall of the Tower room. As yet, it had not been discovered by whom these cartridges had been sold or bought, nor had the revolver been found, despite diligent search. But the bullets exactly fitted the weapon purchased and brought to Yorkshire by the detective; therefore, it stood to reason that the missing revolver was of the same calibre and of more or less the same description.

"How does this strike you?" he asked Miss Maunsell.

She did not shrink away foolishly as many women do at sight of a weapon.

"That's about the size I should say," she remarked. "And it's very like, too; but Mr. Barr's wasn't so shiny and bright as that."

"What became of the revolver when he went away?"

"That I can't tell, because I went before he did. He was to leave a few hours later."

"Well, was the revolver in the drawer when you left?"

"So far as I know. I hadn't seen the drawer open for some days, and he packed for himself, but I suppose it was still there. I don't suppose he took it out."

"Did Miss Verney ever call at Mr. Barr's house?"

"Once, when she'd been walking with him, and was caught in a storm, she came in and had tea. Mr. Barr says to me: 'Miss Maunsell, I've brought in the young lady I hope will be my wife some day — Miss Verney. Please give us the nicest tea and toast you can'; which I did. Other times I used to see Miss Verney occasionally, passing. Perhaps she'd speak to Mr. Barr at the gate, or come for a minute or two into the garden; but never did she show her face our way, I'm sure, after the day that French girl disappeared. Whether she believed anything against Mr. Barr or not, I don't know; but so it was."

"Mr. Barr never said anything to you about Liane?"

"Not he. He would have known better."

"Nor about his reason for leaving Friars' Moat?"

"Not a word. But coming on top of what I'd overheard, I could make a pretty good guess."

"Well, then, that's all I need trouble you about," said the detective, shutting up his note-book. "And I'll do my best to see you're not summoned to the inquest; but of course I can't promise."

"Anyhow, I shan't go," snapped Miss Maunsell.

CHAPTER XIX

A SURPRISE was awaiting Gaylor when he returned from Harrogate and handed in his report. A gun-maker in London had called at Scotland Yard and stated that he had sold a Smith & Wesson revolver, calibre .32 with a box of 50 cartridges, to Ian Barr in the month of August, two years before the tragedy in Riding Wood. The man, whose name was Jonas Sailes, and whose shop was in the Strand, was in a small way of business, and had no assistants except his young son, who had but lately been taken from school to serve customers while the father was laid up after a slight operation. This operation had been upon the eyes, and Sailes had been kept in a dark room for a fortnight. During that time he heard no news from the outside world, and his son, who had no great interest in life except sport, paid no particular attention to the details of the Hereward murder. On his recovery, seeing the name of Mr. Ian Barr in connection with the affair, the elder Sailes remembered the name, consulted his books, and found the purchase of the weapon and cartridges recorded.

This was a strong piece of evidence against Barr, and together with what Gaylor had learned from

Miss Maunsell, things began to look black against the wanted man. All the evidence so far was purely circumstantial, but there was a good deal of it, and it was necessary that Sir Ian Hereward's late steward should be found before the inquest, which had been adjourned again for a fortnight in the hope of unearthing him at home or abroad.

"Cupid" Gaylor had done rather well in the case so far, and he meant to do still better. He had a rooted idea that, if he had been on the spot immediately after the tragedy, the murderer would be already in the hands of the police; but it would be a still greater score if, after others had done their best in vain, the brilliancy of his detective talent should throw light into dark places.

No objection had, or could have, been made to the going abroad of Colonel Sir Ian Hereward, or Miss Verney; but they were both pledged to return for the inquest in a fortnight's time. After that, it would depend upon circumstances, over which those two important witnesses might or might not have control, whether they left England again immediately, or remained there.

Meanwhile Scotland Yard did not intend to lose sight of the ex-officer and the late companion of his murdered wife. Sir Ian's movements were more or less "under observation," but it was considered essential to observe those of Miss Verney more minutely. A young man, a friend of Gaylor's, with some French

blood in his veins and a perfect French accent at the tip of his tongue, was detailed to "shadow" the young lady. He was to follow her everywhere; to know what visits she received and what excursions she made; and as the English police was in touch with the French, the post-office authorities wherever she went would be accommodating. This *espionage* was to be conducted in such a way, however, as to leave the girl under the impression that she was free as air until her return to England for the inquest.

As a matter of fact, she had expected and feared that she might be watched, and though Miss Ricardo's arguments were consoling, Nora had determined from the first to be ceaselessly on guard. She felt that eyes would be upon her always; yet for certain reasons the prospect of going to France, of all countries, filled her with joy. She would be careful; nevertheless, a thing which she desired greatly to happen might somehow happen, without bringing harm to any one, but only good.

The dreaded word "police" was constantly in her mind, yet the "police" was for the girl a vague, looming monster, Argus-eyed, and with the many hands of a Briareus. She did not think of separate entities; and though Nora was aware that a detective had wormed from little Poppet Barnard information which had brought Kate Craigie and her footman-lover into ugly prominence, it did not occur to her that the same

man might assume vast importance in her own life. If she had heard Gaylor's name at the inquest in connection with Poppet, she had forgotten it, and all her fears as well as her hopes were for the moment transferred to France. With Miss Ricardo she stopped in Paris for one night only, and then went on to Chamounix. The quaint little place, with its vast white background of Mont Blanc, was beautiful to them both — to Terry, who had lived for years in India; to Nora, who had never been out of England — and they stayed there two or three days longer than they had intended. But this change of plan was not wholly on account of their delight in Chamounix. Terry had the idea of driving by pleasant stages to St. Pierre de Chartreuse; and, having received an answer to a letter posted in Paris, Nora Verney asked a great favour of Miss Ricardo. It was largely because of the granting of this favour that the two were delayed in Chamounix; and meantime Gaylor was exceedingly busy at Riding St. Mary.

He arrived there the day after his return from Harrogate, and made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was a detective, engaged upon the business which filled the minds of every one in the neighbourhood. But he did try, with his agreeable manner and pleasant looks, to hypnotize people into the belief that detectives were not the repulsively cunning creatures pictured in penny fiction.

He looked like a good-natured, happy boy, and it was his *métier* to impress upon all those with whom he associated that he was precisely what he seemed, and no more. His dimples and blue eyes were worth a great deal to him, in creating this impression; and soon the villagers and peasants of the neighbourhood began to regard it as a huge joke that such a jolly youth as Gaylor should be a member of the London police force. They liked talking with him, and spoke out their opinions and theories more freely than they would to a person whose age and dignity they had need to respect.

The first thing that Gaylor did on coming down to pursue his investigations near Riding St. Mary, was to go straight to the Home Farm of Riding Wood and call on Mrs. Barnard. It was about tea time, and Tom Barnard was in the house. Both looked at the detective with cold disapproval, as he presented himself at the door, for they recognized him at once as the man who had cajoled their little girl, behind their backs, into making statements which had got friends of theirs into trouble. They had seen him on the second day of the inquest, when Poppet's evidence had been taken; and now Tom's first words, gruffly spoken, were: "Well, what's up now, Mr. Detective?"

"I've come to tell you that I'm sorry if you think me a sneak," said Gaylor frankly. "I had to do it, you know. Once you're in my line, it isn't what you like doing, but what it's your duty to do. And now

I've been sent down here again, to see what I can find out."

"You've found out all there is to find out in *this* house," replied Rose, quite sharply for her.

"Oh, I know that," "Cupid" assured her. "It isn't business that's brought me to you, though it has to the neighbourhood. I want nothing more nor less than to make my peace with that dear little girl of yours. I thought she was just about the best thing in the shape of a child I'd ever seen. Look what I've brought her — with my humblest apologies for the past, and hopes of making up for it in the future."

Then he opened a long box wrapped in paper, which he had been carrying under his arm, and revealed to the eyes of Rose and her daughter Poppet such a doll as few country-bred children have ever seen.

It lay asleep in its box, its golden head on a silk pillow trimmed with lace. Not only had it real hair, waving and curling to its waist, but the dark eyelashes on its shut lids were real, too. Its smiling red lips were slightly open, showing several tiny, even, white teeth, and as Gaylor lifted it up, at the same time manipulating some spring or string hidden under the dress of pink silk, muslin and lace, it said "Papa," "Mamma," as it opened large brown eyes.

Poppet, who had not dared to speak to the "nice grown-up" whom she had heard reviled by her family, could not restrain a cry of wonder and delight. Even

Rose gave a little unsophisticated "Oh!" of admiration for the Parisian beauty; and when the detective held out the box and doll to Poppet, as a peace offering, she had not the heart to deny the child the possession of such a treasure.

The little girl, lost in joy, clasped the glorious beauty to her bosom; and Gaylor's appealing, dimpled smile chased all animosity from the breasts of father and mother. It was true, as he said, he had acted in the pursuance of duty, and he did appear to be a kind-hearted, agreeable young fellow. He was enchanted with Poppet's pleasure, and vowed again that this time he had no "ulterior motives." He was so engaging and boyish, that Rose offered him tea, and both she and Tom enjoyed the chat into which he drew them, without their knowing that they had been drawn. He told the Barnards that he would have to remain in the country for some time, very likely till the inquest came on again, and asked their advice, in a simple, friendly way, as to lodgings. At present he was staying in the village inn, but it was hardly worthy the name of inn, and he was not very comfortable. Where would Mrs. Barnard advise him to apply?

Rose mentioned several cottages where lodgers were occasionally taken in the summer, but there was some objection to each one, the most desirable rooms being already occupied. At last, when the list was exhausted, Gaylor ventured: "I suppose you couldn't possibly

have me here? Any sort of room would do for me, and I'd promise to make as little trouble as possible. I've taken the greatest fancy to Poppet, and to the place, and I should be as happy as a cricket in any corner you could give me. Besides, Mr. Barnard being a friend of Sir Ian Hereward's, you might both feel as though in a way you were helping the police on in their search for the murderer, if you allowed one of them to do his duty from your house. I should have some good games with little Miss Poppet here, in my spare moments."

Rose was completely taken aback, and Tom would have refused at once, if Poppet had not flown to the young man, and nestled between his knees.

"Oh, shouldn't I love to have you live in our house!" she exclaimed. "You'd play with me, and tell me stories, wouldn't you?"

"That I would; and I know some grand stories, too," Gaylor boasted. "Mrs. Barnard, do say 'yes.'"

And somehow, Rose did eventually say "yes," why, she hardly knew, any more than Tom knew why he did not object to the decision. The young man certainly had a way with him!

That same evening, the detective became a member of the Barnard's family circle. His "corner" was a pleasant, oak-beamed room, with dimity-curtained, diamond-paned windows. His meals he took with the Barnards, and was so gay and good-natured that

no one less grim than Diogenes could have hardened his heart against him. He was always ready to help Rose, when Tom was engaged in farm work, or to take Poppet for a walk in the woods, a pleasure Rose had no time to give the child on most days, until after the tea hour. Catechisms after these excursions assured Poppet's mother that the "nice grown-up" had been putting no more sly questions, but that, instead, the child's companion had told her fairy stories, or taught her how to spell words and do amusing little sums in arithmetic. Even Poppet's unfriendly little fox terrier, which invariably barked at strangers, and had objected to Gaylor, as to everybody else, on his first appearance, yielded to the charm, and became the detective's devoted adherent. Jacky made the third in all the woods walks, and enjoyed himself hugely, nosing into rabbit warrens and other private dwelling-places of retiring forest folk. To any one who had watched these excursions with curiosity, it might have seemed that there was some method in them. The young man took the child and the dog a different walk each day; and the walks were in concentric circles, leaving very little ground in the woods uncovered. Whenever Jacky excited himself over a rabbit-hole or other object of interest, Gaylor was all sympathy. If the fox terrier were inclined to dig, "Cupid" helped him, telling a fascinating tale to Poppet the while; the story of a fairy Jacky had seen disappearing into a burrow,

having hastily assumed the form of a bunny — or some other fancy equally alluring to an imaginative little being like Margaret Barnard.

One morning, not very far from the top of the hill where the View Tower stood, the emotional Jacky bored his sharp nose, in a state of great nervous excitement, among the gnarled roots of a tree, exposed by the cutting away of thick masses of bracken, which had been done by order of the police immediately after the murder of Lady Hereward.

No creature less energetic and keen of scent than a fox terrier would have suspected the existence of a rabbit-hole under the low arches of the beech tree's gray roots, but Jacky was certain of its existence, and Gaylor encouraged him, as usual.

"Good dog! Have him out!" he cried, as Jacky wildly clawed, and pawed, and nosed his way through the labyrinth of root-barriers. "He knows," the young man explained to Poppet, "that a stolen fairy treasure-chest has been buried there by a wicked gnome, for fairies talk to dogs in dreams. Now, I'll just see if I can reach that treasure-chest with my hand."

"You've never found anything of the fairies yet," Poppet said, reproachfully, "except some of their jewels, which they'd turned into stones before you touched them."

"Even those were better than nothing," argued

Gaylor, "and you never know what you'll have the luck to come across next time."

"I'm always afraid, when you stick your hand into places like that, that a snake will jump out and bite you," said Poppet.

"Snakes and rabbits don't live together so far as I've heard," returned Gaylor. "Jove! I've got hold of something this time, for sure!" He began extricating his arm from the twisting embrace of the tree-roots, and an instant later Poppet saw that he had pulled out of the hole a metal thing, caked with earth; quite a small thing which he could almost hide in his hand. "Oh, what's that?" she asked eagerly.

"Nothing that would interest you much, I'm afraid," replied the detective, slipping the thing into one of his coat pockets, and carefully covering it over with the flap, as he pushed the thwarted fox terrier gently away.

"But you have turned quite pink, as if you were interested," said the child. "You might tell me what it is. It looks like one of Dad's tools."

"That's all it is; a kind of tool," answered Gaylor. "But I'm fond of tools, and you're not. That's one of the differences between us, you see. Perhaps it was a tool of the wicked gnome's, that he opened the fairy chest with, and left when he'd got all the treasure." Gaylor pulled out his watch and looked at it. "Why it's time we were trotting home!" he exclaimed, as if surprised at the lateness of the hour. "And if you

like, when we get back, I'll sketch you a picture of the gnome at the bottom of the rabbit-hole, opening the treasure-chest; only you must leave me alone in my room while I do it. I never could make pictures with any one watching me."

So they walked down to the farmhouse, the man and the child, with Jacky trotting at their heels or darting ahead on some quest or other; and Gaylor told Poppet the best story he had invented yet, which was saying a good deal, as he had a magnificent talent in verbal fiction. But all the time he was thinking of what he had found, and congratulating himself on the success of his plans. He had remembered the fox-terrier, and the innocent tales of its cleverness in finding rabbit holes, told by the little girl during their first conversation together; and it was the recollection of that childish boasting which had given him the idea of lodging at the Home Farm. Known, as he already was in the neighbourhood, a marked man since his evidence given at the inquest, he could not have wandered freely about the woods with a strange dog, had he continued to stop at the inn in his own character, as Gaylor, the man from Scotland Yard. He would have been followed and watched by curious people, and any discovery he might have made would have been known to others almost as soon as to himself. Or, if he had adopted some disguise, his actions as a stranger would have been regarded with suspicion.

From the first, Gaylor had said to himself: "If I were the murderer, and had any fear that for some reason or other I might be eventually suspected, I wouldn't try to get rid of the revolver at home, or near home. I'd hide it in some place as close as I could to the scene of the murder, before I'd gone far away. And if I had my wits about me, I wouldn't just trust to the bracken to hide it. I'd think that it would be looked for there, and found when the bracken was cut down, as it would surely be. I'd fear bloodhounds, too, and try to put the thing in a place where my trail, if once they got on it, would be crossed by some other strong scent. What could be better for such a hide than a rabbit warren, if I could find one, or knew already where to find one? And if I were a person familiar with the woods, I might very likely know where to find one."

Gaylor had argued in this fashion, and he had begun with the opinion that a terrier would be a useful companion. To this theory and its later development, little Poppet Barnard owed a great many pleasant hours and delightful stories which she would never forget.

On reaching home, after the adventure of the rabbit hole, the child told Rose all about the fairy chest stolen by the wicked gnome, and prattled on about something unearthed by Gaylor, which he had said was not at all interesting. But Poppet, eagerly awaiting the sketch promised at dinner time, made so little of the

discovery that Rose attached no importance to it, not guessing that, locked in his bedroom upstairs, Gaylor was at that very moment engaged in examining the weapon which, in all probability, had put an end to Lady Hereward's life.

It was a small neat revolver of 32 calibre, and only two of the six cartridges had been discharged. Four were left, and caked round the muzzle was something of a dark reddish colour, which looked like dried blood. Particles of pale brown earth adhered to this mass, as if they had stuck to it while it was still comparatively fresh and semi-liquid. But the fact that the revolver should be bloodstained was singularly suggestive to the mind of the detective. Evidently the murderer, having fired the two shots, and seen his victim fall, had either dropped his weapon, and her blood had stained it, or else he had coolly laid it on the floor near the body while he stripped the dead Lady Hereward of her rings, her bracelets and her other jewelry.

The next step for the detective was to learn whether this revolver which he had found was the one sold by Sailes to Ian Barr; and after the Barnards' midday dinner, which he shared with them, he went up to London with his treasure, carefully wrapped in paper, in his pocket. The gunmaker recognized the weapon as that which Mr. Barr had bought from him; and, as Gaylor expressed it to himself, there was "one more nail in the coffin" of Ian Barr.

CHAPTER XX

Though Gaylor had the air of idling away most of his time at Riding St. Mary, and never seemed seriously to catechise any one in the neighbourhood, somehow he picked up an extraordinary amount of information, particularly concerning the habits of most of the persons connected closely or remotely with Friars' Moat. Among the most important of his gleanings was the fact that Ian Barr had at one time been in the habit of using the upper room in the Tower as a kind of study. A year ago, or not much more, he had been writing a series of articles on the Roman camps in Surrey; and as there were finely marked traces of an encampment on the hill of the View Tower, Sir Ian Hereward — interested in the young man's work — had suggested his writing in the Tower. He had offered to ask permission from Mrs. Forestier; she had granted it freely; and Sir Ian had lent Barr the key which was very seldom used by any one at Friars' Moat. When Barr had finished the articles, he was known to have returned the key of the Tower. All this Gaylor learned from the butler at the Moat, who had heard of the matter in talk around the table at the time; had forgotten it, but remembered distinctly

when his recollections had been baited and played, with the skill of a true fisherman, by the detective.

Thus it was established that Barr had at one period gone every day, or nearly every day, to the View Tower, beginning a habit which he might have chosen to keep up secretly, after having ostensibly dropped it. It would have been the easiest thing in the world for him to have Sir Ian's key copied, as he had certainly had it for weeks in his possession; and it was not unnatural that he might have wanted to keep the run of the place. At his own cottage, which was more picturesque than convenient, he had but one sitting-room, where he must do his work, write his letters, see his callers and eat his meals. Besides, the situation of the housekeeper's room just above made it practically impossible to hold a private conversation in that sitting-room, if she were overhead or likely to go. It seemed almost certain to Gaylor that Barr would have had the key copied, in order to use the Tower when he chose.

He must have known that neither Mrs. Forestier nor any one else, with the exception of Barnard, opened the Tower doors twice a year. As for Barnard, he went only once every few weeks; and it would have been possible for Barr to find out which days were chosen by the farmer for his inspection. Even if Tom had come upon the steward there, no harm would have been done, for it might be supposed that Barr retained permission to go when he liked.

Through Kate Craigie, Gaylor discovered that Lady Hereward had believed her French maid Liane kept tryst with Ian Barr at the Tower. Why Lady Hereward had held this belief Kate did not know, but supposed she "must have heard something." Possibly Liane had been seen going to the Tower; in any case Kate knew that "her ladyship," who disapproved of Mr. Barr from the first, "because he was a dangerous socialist," suddenly became bitterly prejudiced against him, on account of an alleged flirtation between him and Liane.

Each day it began to appear more and more important to find Ian Barr, and the theory of the police was that he would be found through Miss Verney. Nevertheless, Nora had contrived to thwart the vigilance of her "shadow" on arriving in Paris, by posting a letter which he could not identify as hers.

He was there, on the spot, and watching, when she slipped something into a letter-box at the Gare du Nord. He had been given specimens of her handwriting, before he left England, and was granted the privilege of seeing each letter which the box contained. But not only was there no envelope or card addressed to Ian Barr, but there was no handwriting which resembled Miss Verney's. The half-French detective had an aggravating conviction that, if he could only open each of the many letters, he would find one from Nora Verney to Ian Barr; but he could not do that,

and he had to acknowledge himself defeated for the moment. Barr had doubtless taken another name, and Miss Verney had asked a friend to address her envelope, or had used a typewriter.

Michel examined the contents of the letter-box, in company with a postman instructed by the French police, while Miss Ricardo and her travelling companion dined. He "shadowed" the two ladies in Paris for the short time they spent there, and journeyed with them to Chamounix, where he put up in a cheap room at their hotel. They did nothing that repaid his watchfulness, but when they had been at the mountain village for several days, he learned that they proposed a driving tour. They were not engaging a carriage and horse at Chamounix, but had sent elsewhere, which struck Michel as odd, though he did not quite see how it bore upon the business which had brought him to France.

He could not find out for some time whence the vehicle would come, but at last heard from some employé of the hotel that it was to arrive from St. Pierre de Chartreuse, whither it would return with the ladies. This was disappointing to Michel, because it ceased to appear strange. It was natural enough to engage a conveyance of the hotel at which they intended to stop, where the landlord might make a better price for incoming guests than would one about to lose his clients.

Michel was on hand when the carriage arrived at the Chamounix Hotel, and saw Miss Ricardo and Miss Verney go out to look at it. There were two good horses; the vehicle was a well-appointed landau, with a rack for light luggage behind; and the driver was a noticeably smart young man. He had a clean-shaven face, as dark as a Spaniard's, but rather long, wavy black hair, which fell from under a broad-brimmed hat over the collar of his coat. He was tall, with a fine slim figure, and was dressed like a peasant.

Miss Ricardo and Miss Verney seemed to be very much interested in the carriage, which arrived toward evening, and they asked the picturesque young man a number of questions in Italian, of which Michel understood only a few words. They were answered in the same language — and it surprised the detective that the driver from St. Pierre de Chartreuse should be an Italian. He reflected, however, that "Ricardo" was an Italian name, and this expedition was Miss Ricardo's affair. That might explain the seeming mystery, yet he resolved to find out all about the matter, when he had followed the ladies to St. Pierre de Chartreuse, as he not only intended to do, but to be close upon their heels. Even apparently unimportant details were of interest when connected with this case, and nobody could tell what bearing they might have upon it.

That night the coachman put up his horses and slept at Chamounix. Next morning early the ladies were ready to start; and Michel, who had engaged a vehicle for himself, started also. Other driving parties, as well as automobilists, were leaving the hotel at the same hour, and there was no reason why he should be remarked by Miss Ricardo and Miss Verney.

The ladies were evidently not in a hurry to reach their journey's end, or they would have chosen to travel by train or motor. The first day, having started early in the morning, they reached La Grande Chartreuse in time for luncheon. Paul Michel was not far behind them. He too stopped to eat, and saw the great monastery, like most other travellers who toured in this direction, and several times encountered Miss Ricardo and Miss Verney, who scarcely glanced at him. Once, in the vast, deserted monastery itself, they condescended to show their Italian-speaking driver something of the place, or else he, being already familiar with it, was playing guide. Michel could not be sure which was the case, but the young man walked respectfully by Miss Verney's side, while Miss Ricardo wandered ahead, with a volume of Murray in her hand.

"I wonder?" Michel began to ask himself, in response to a striking idea which was knocking at his mind.

He had no portrait of Ian Barr as a grown man,

for the reason that, if any had been taken, Scotland Yard had not been able to learn where or when. Michel had, however, an old picture of Sir Ian Hereward's young relative, as a boy of thirteen, made in Barr's school days, and discovered at a local photographer's since the murder. The detective slipped it between the leaves of his guide book, glancing from it to the face of the long-haired coachman, and comparing the features. But he could not be sure that they were the same. If this dark peasant in the wide-brimmed hat were Ian Barr in disguise, that disguise was a good one. The only thing was to watch and wait. If Ian Barr were really conducting his fiancée and her friend, he would betray himself sooner or later.

The party took three days on the way to St. Pierre de Chartreuse, though they could have accomplished the distance in less time. Perhaps they lingered on the road only because it was beautiful; perhaps because a pair of lovers dreaded to part. Michel was a vigilant spy, but he could not discover, so far, that any private interviews took place between the coachman and Nora Verney.

About five o'clock on the third day the carriage containing the two ladies and their light luggage drew up before one of the best hotels in the beautiful little village of St. Pierre de Chartreuse. Michel was near enough in his following conveyance to see them received by the landlord. No look of recognition passed between

the proprietor of the hotel and the man who had brought his guests from Chamounix. This was odd, for if the fellow really came from St. Pierre de Chartreuse, he would almost certainly have been sent by the hotel at which Miss Ricardo meant to stay.

When the two dressing-bags and suitcases had been carried into the hotel, the young man still stood by the horses' heads. On the wide balcony at the top of the steps Miss Ricardo and Nora Verney consulted together for a moment in low voices. Then Miss Ricardo took an envelope out of her guide book, and gave it to Miss Verney, who ran down with it to the driver. She put it in his hand, and said a few words to him with an appearance of earnestness. Then he touched his hat (which Michel had never seen him remove), mounted to the box of his vehicle and drove off.

Meanwhile the detective had descended, without waiting for the first carriage to make the way clear. Having paid his coachman and seen his luggage carried up the steps by a porter, he reached the balcony himself just in time to witness a somewhat dramatic little scene, which he would not have missed for a great deal.

The two ladies, whom Michel admired extremely, were chatting with the landlord, a lesser personage having been sent to welcome the newcomer, when in the doorway appeared Sir Ian Hereward.

Michel had never seen Sir Ian in the flesh, but he had studied his features in many newspaper snap-

shots and sketches, during the last ten days, asking himself whether or no the face was the face of a murderer. Now he recognized it instantly, leaping to the startling conclusion that this meeting, at a remote village in France, had been arranged between Sir Ian and Teresina Ricardo.

Here was something better than he had dreamed of expecting, and he was delighted. The fact that this man and this woman journeyed so far from their world to meet each other, seemed to prove that Miss Ricardo had perjured herself in swearing that Ian Hereward had not loved her, long ago, in India. They had been separated for years, these two; and as they had apparently met in private only once (on the afternoon of the murder) since the old days in India, there must have been something between them, or they would not be keeping this tryst now.

"At last the wife is out of the way, and they aren't losing much time in profiting by it!" Michel said to himself.

This put a rather different complexion on his business. He had been sent after Nora Verney in the hope of running down Ian Barr. But since Ian Hereward came to St. Pierre de Chartreuse, Michel's theory of the murder was shaken. What if, after all, the elder Ian knew more about it than the younger, and Barr were but a scapegoat?

Of course, it would soon be known at headquarters

that Sir Ian was here, if it were not known already, since the ex-officer was under observation; yet some kudos might be gained, in spite of that fact, if Michel played his cards well. He intended to let not the smallest chance slip, and the eyes which flashed from Sir Ian to Teresina Ricardo and Nora Verney were the merciless eyes of a lynx.

Michel saw Sir Ian start as if with astonishment at the sight of the two women; saw him hesitate in the doorway as if he were minded to beat a retreat; saw Miss Ricardo turn scarlet, and Nora Verney grow as pale as if she were faint, and heard the elder woman exclaim: "Sir Ian!" Still, the detective's conviction that this encounter was a "put-up job" did not waver for an instant. He thought that Sir Ian was a creditable actor, and that perhaps Miss Ricardo had not wished the first meeting to take place like this, on the hotel verandah, in the presence of half a dozen people. (It would be like a woman to have planned out something more romantic, and to be disappointed!) It struck him as probable that Nora Verney was not in the secret. The two most concerned would naturally wish her to believe that they met by accident; but, thought Michel, she would be a little idiot to be deceived, considering what kind of place was St. Pierre de Chartreuse. If it were Aix-les-Bains, for instance, where all the world passed and repassed, it might be different.

Miss Ricardo's faint cry of recognition put an end, of course, to Sir Ian's hesitation. He took a few steps forward, and held out his hand to her.

"This is indeed a great surprise!" he said.

"It is indeed," she echoed.

They shook hands, looking straight into each other's eyes for a second or two, as if in spite of everything it was a joy to meet, a joy which would not be denied. They had the air of thinking that they two were alone in the world, just for an instant; and then, as though with the birth of the same thought, they dropped hands and turned to Miss Verney.

"Nora! How very strange, isn't it?" almost stammered Terry, as if she were afraid that the girl did not believe in her surprise. And if she were afraid of this (thought the detective), it at least was not as strange as some other things.

"Yes," said Nora, in a low voice. "It is strange." She looked frightened, almost horrified, it seemed to the detective, who had some sympathy for her, as she was, in his opinion, the prettiest girl he had ever seen. She did not put out her hand, and neither did Sir Ian. Michel noticed that the ex-officer gazed at her somewhat sadly and that she appeared to turn her eyes distastefully from his.

"Can that girl have found out anything about Sir Ian Hereward which has made her hate him?" the detective wondered, in a kind of professional ecstasy.

CHAPTER XXI

"WHAT an extraordinary thing that you should come to St. Pierre de Chartreuse!" Terry Ricardo said to Sir Ian, elaborately unconscious that Nora had walked away, and gone into the house.

The two stood alone, together on the hotel balcony, for the landlord seeing that they were old acquaintances who had something to say to each other, vanished discreetly, to hurry after the young lady and show her the rooms which had been reserved on receipt of a telegram from Chamounix.

"Do you think it extraordinary?" Sir Ian asked, with an odd wistfulness in his tone.

"Why, yes. It is such a little village," said Terry. "So few English people have heard of it."

"I heard of it more than thirteen years ago, and never forgot," answered Sir Ian, looking over the hills into the sunset. "A girl described it to me once in India, and said she loved it. Since then I often thought I would come, if I needed peace and rest. From the description it seemed that kind of place."

"You mean — is it possible you remember a talk we once had?"

"I don't easily forget. It was at Major Raine's dinner party, and we ——"

"Yes — yes, I know."

"I've felt just lately as if I should go out of my mind if I stayed in England. I had to get clear away. The thought of putting the Channel between me and — and —— But you understand."

"Oh, yes."

"And the idea of this little place which you had loved kept floating in my brain. I said to myself that, if I liked it as much as I expected to, I would have it to return to again after — you know, of course, that I must go back to Riding Wood for a few days."

"I know. So you mean to stay for awhile at dear little St. Pierre de Chartreuse?"

"No," said Sir Ian. "I don't mean to stay."

"Don't you like it, then, after all?" Terry's face fell.

"I've grown to love it, though I've only been here three days. I have taken some beautiful walks. I should think you could find a new walk every day for a month."

"Why, that's what I used to say!"

"I know you did."

"Yet, you don't mean to stop?"

"No."

Terry looked up at him searchingly. "Please tell me truly. Is it because we have come?"

"Yes," Sir Ian answered.

"We spoil the place for you!"

"You know that isn't the reason," he said, "and it would be cruel to pretend you think it is. But I mustn't stop here, now you have come. Terry," (he seemed to speak her name unconsciously, and then start at the sound of it in his own voice) — "that old fox Smedley has taken it upon himself to play detective, and is following me about, delighting in the fact that I know what he's after. He wears a sort of defiant 'Cat may look at a King' air, if I run across him in a railway-station or a hotel corridor. I've dodged him, or he's letting me hope I have, since Grenoble, but he may turn up at any time. I don't know what his object is, unless to annoy me, and yet ——"

"*I* know," said Terry, flushing deeply, but with eyes frank and unashamed. "No doubt he made it his business to find out that I was coming abroad too, and he wanted to see if ——"

"Probably," Sir Ian drily asserted, as she paused. "Well he mustn't see what he wants to see. By Jove, shooting would be too good for a beast like that!" When these words had broken from him, Sir Ian winced. After such a tragedy as had just darkened his life, a man does not speak lightly of shooting. For a second he had forgotten; but now he was sorely conscious again of the weight of his burden.

"You are going to let the thought of Major Smedley drive you away from this little abode of peace!" Terry exclaimed.

Sir Ian looked at her, but didn't speak. He would not say, "It is for your sake." It ought not to be necessary to say that.

His look calmed Terry, who was always ruffled to the point of extreme irritation by the very mention of Major Smedley's name. It was infuriating that so mean a creature should have power to obtrude himself upon her life, or Ian Hereward's; but an instant's reflection showed her that Sir Ian was right.

"It is a pity," she said. "I think it would have done us both good to have a few friendly talks together in a place like this, for I want to keep your friendship, Ian; and I have given you mine. But at such a time, with Major Smedley spying upon us with his hateful cat's eyes, everything would be spoiled. I see that. But it's a pity — a pity!"

"I've had three peaceful days. He can't rob me of those," answered Sir Ian, with a tired smile. "I feel better for them, and for even this short talk with you — this sight of you. I take it as a blessing. Besides ——"

"Besides — what?" she asked, when he stopped.

"Why, you seemed to be with me here, before you came, before I dreamed you might come. Your old self, showing me the walks you told me about, so long

ago. I am glad I've been able to see the place — you don't mind."

"Why should I mind, Ian?"

"I hope there's no reason. Since Smedley hasn't turned up, no harm is done."

"He is here!" said Terry quickly, in a changed voice.

They both glanced down the road. A carriage was driving up. In it sat Major Smedley, old-looking and yellow in his gray flannels and travelling-cap. Even as they saw him, he saw them, standing there together on the hotel balcony. A flash of intelligence darted from his eyes. He half smiled; and then bit his lip. As he raised his cap to Miss Ricardo, she turned her shoulder, cutting him deliberately.

"Too late!" she whispered. "Well — it was to be!"

"Wiser not to have cut him like that, Terry," Sir Ian said quickly. "It will make him more venomous."

"Nothing could make him more venomous! This has happened, and I'm not going to be afraid of the creature. Ian, you mustn't go away from St. Pierre de Chartreuse now. You see, it would only look as if he had caught us, and we were ashamed. There is nothing in the world for either of us to be ashamed of."

"No, I won't go at once," Sir Ian answered.

The landlord came out again from the hotel, which was one of those simple inns where patron and manager are one and the same. As he prepared to welcome the

latest arrival, Terry spoke with him in English. "Has Miss Verney registered her name and mine yet, monsieur?" she inquired, with the intention of quietly letting Major Smedley know, without delay, that she had just come to St. Pierre de Chartreuse. (He would soon find out that Sir Ian had been several days in the hotel.)

The landlord replied that the young lady had already signed the necessary papers, for herself and her friend; and as Miss Ricardo had apparently no more questions to ask, he was free to give his attention to the new guest.

Then when Terry had been answered, she began talking to Sir Ian as if nothing had happened; but her heart was beating fast, and she had not longer any joy in the thought of her well-loved St. Pierre de Chartreuse. It might have been pleasant to meet and associate with Ian Hereward as a friend, if there could indeed be any joy in life for either, after the ordeal through which they had passed, and had still to pass; but of course, everything was spoiled now. She hardly knew what she said to Sir Ian, after Major Smedley had gone into the hotel with the landlord, and she was glad though surprised to see Nora Verney appear at the door.

"Oh, Miss Ricardo!" exclaimed the girl. "If you won't think me rude, may I beg you to come inside for a few minutes?"

"I was just ready to come," answered Terry. "*Au revoir*, Sir Ian."

She smiled at him in her sweet and friendly way, leaving him at once, and going in to Nora, who had already vanished from the door.

The girl was standing at the foot of the stairs, looking anxious and excited, her beautiful eyes very bright.

"I don't want to take you away from him," she apologized. "Only — if I might speak to you about something — something important to me, and then you could go back ——"

"I don't need to go back," said Terry. "I would like to look at our rooms with you. Perhaps you ran down to tell me they weren't nice? If there's anything wrong, I can ask the landlord ——"

"Oh, no, the rooms are very nice," replied Nora. "You'll be angry, I'm afraid, but I got thinking after I went in and left you talking to Sir Ian; what if you would speak to him about *my* Ian, and ——"

"I didn't tell him," Terry broke in. "But suppose I had? Sir Ian was always his friend. You don't dream that his knowing would make the slightest difference?"

"Sir Ian wouldn't tell. I don't mean that," Nora explained. "But I'm sure Ian would hate to have him know he was here, and how. I thought perhaps you mightn't think it any harm to tell him — so I flew down, as soon as the idea came into my head, to beg you not."

"Of course I won't say a word if you don't wish me to," returned Terry. "It's your secret. But really your manner with Sir Ian is very strange. You didn't shake hands, and you rushed away as if you hated the sight of him."

"I do!" the girl panted almost weeping; then she drew her breath in sharply, as if she had said something she ought not to have said. "I can't explain," she went on piteously, "any more than I could explain before about not accepting kindness from you, as if it were given for his sake. If you are angry with me, you must just send me away. I can't help it."

"I'm not angry, but I'm very sorry," said Miss Ricardo. "I don't pretend to understand how you feel toward Sir Ian, or why you hate to see him; but I don't want you to explain, since you find it so hard. In any case, perhaps it would be better not. But I'm sorry, because (though I hadn't the remotest idea of this meeting, you may be sure) for some reasons it is best for him to stop on here instead of going away. Now it's *my* turn not to explain; but I think you will take my word. We must stay; and he, too, must stay, for a day or so at least."

Nora bowed her head and did not answer. They went up stairs together, and looked at the rooms; two bedrooms adjoining, and a sitting-room, with a charming view from the windows. Terry professed to be delighted with everything, and they talked no more of

Sir Ian, or Ian Barr; but even as they chatted about the exquisite grouping of the mountains, and the prettiness of the flowers with which the little suite was generously decorated, their thoughts were not with their words, which came mechanically, as women's words can.

That evening they dined in their own sitting-room; but this was not because Terry feared the prying eyes of Major Smedley. It was because she would not dine below without asking Sir Ian Hereward to sit at her table; and with Nora Verney behaving so strangely toward him, a meal together would be agreeable to no one concerned. Terry pitied Nora deeply, knowing that she suffered, and that perhaps there was no help for her suffering; but, womanlike, she could not push a certain resentfulness out of her heart. She had brought Miss Verney abroad because she was sorry for her, and because Sir Ian had asked her to be kind. It did seem a shame that the inexplicable moods of an undisciplined girl should blacken the sky already clouded by Major Smedley's hateful presence.

Terry began to pity herself as well as Nora, and Sir Ian had a great deal more than either; yet into the midst of her pity for the man would dart a sharper stab of pain sometimes. Why had Nora turned against him? If he had been a man of different nature, dark thoughts might have flitted across her fancy; but — no, she could not, would not, believe anything vulgarly base of Ian Hereward. She would believe

that he loved his wife; that he had been true to her in thought and deed; that he passionately regretted her death, for which he had been in no way responsible; and that whatever Nora Verney's reasons were for disliking him, they were childish or unjust.

It had been easy to say that she did not want to know them, but Terry could not control her curiosity, nor could she prevent her imagination from wandering downstairs to the *salle à manger*, with its one long table, at which the guests who dined in public must assemble. She pictured Sir Ian at one end of the table, and the self-appointed detective at the other; but she was far from guessing at the presence of another detective, appointed by Scotland Yard.

Paul Michel, neat, inconspicuous, very like a middle-class French tourist, was at the table d'hôte enjoying the dinner which he felt that he had well earned. Also he was enjoying the thought of the play upon which he would presently ring up the curtain. That which was going on now, he said to himself, was no more than a prologue; but it was rather a brilliant prologue.

Since arriving Michel had accomplished a good deal. He had ferreted out the fact that the driver who conducted Miss Ricardo and Miss Verney from Chamounix, was not of St. Pierre de Chartreuse or of the neighbourhood, though the impression had been created in the Chamounix hotel that the ladies' carriage was coming from St. Pierre. No one at the latter

place knew anything about the fellow, except that he was a stranger; and Michel's suspicions amounted almost to certainty now. A warrant was out for Ian Barr's arrest, in England, therefore Michel could get an order for the man's extradition by the French police; but the thing was, to prove identity, and the detective knew that he would be laughed at, rather than pitied, if he were unlucky enough to make a mistake.

Having discovered that the driver was a stranger, Michel went immediately to the local police, with a letter from high authorities in Paris. He stated his suspicions concerning the dark young man who spoke Italian, and gave his theory regarding the adoption of that language. It would be difficult for a foreigner to pose as a Frenchman in France, whereas a doubtful accent in another tongue might not be criticized; and a lucky knowledge of Italian, shared by two ladies, had given their conductor a great advantage in carrying out a disguise.

Michel's new colleagues, deeply interested, agreed with him in thinking that, if there were delay in confirming his suspicions, the man could easily be trapped without awaiting further developments. He could be asked to show his driving licence, and if — as it seemed probable — he had hired the carriage and horses from some person not above accepting a bribe, he would be caught. If he had borrowed his licence, it would tell

whence he had come, and the real name of the coachman. The fellow would then be called upon to prove his identity; and if unable to satisfy the police, he must remain in their hands until Michel had tightened the cords.

All being settled between the men, it was arranged that the first step should be taken the following morning, unless the detective from Scotland Yard made a fortunate *coup* meanwhile; but of doing this he had few hopes.

He said to himself that the sight of Sir Ian Hereward at St. Pierre de Chartreuse had given Miss Verney a shock. Evidently Miss Ricardo had not told her that she expected him; for that the meeting was prearranged between the two, Michel had not a doubt.

He thought the girl was evidently alarmed for the safety of her lover. She would now fear to have Sir Ian see the Italian driver lest, knowing him well, he would recognize Ian Barr. If this theory were correct, what was her first act likely to be? Michel asked himself. Naturally, she would communicate with Barr as soon as possible, perhaps making an excuse to send for the driver, and give him instructions for next day. Once with him, she would warn him that Sir Ian had arrived.

Michel was sure that this was what would happen, and that it would happen before midnight. He did not believe that Miss Verney would bring Barr into

Miss Ricardo's sitting-room for a talk. Probably the girl would secretly smuggle a note to the small inn, where the coachman had put up, and she would arrange to meet him at some quiet spot near the hotel.

The detective could scarcely have eaten his dinner in peace if, before sitting down, he had not ascertained that the ladies were dining in private. Sure of this arrangement, he caused the door of Miss Ricardo's sitting-room to be watched by a servant of the hotel, who believed him an admirer of the younger woman, Miss Verney. If either of the ladies should go out, or receive any one, or send a note, he was to be informed at once.

It was not until after he had comfortably finished his meal, that word was brought to him of something which had happened. A waiter who served dinner in the private sitting-room had been told by the younger lady to give a letter to a porter who could run out with it immediately. The chambermaid who had earned Michel's bribe had seen the envelope. It was addressed to Guiseppe Verdi, Hotel des Bons Amis.

"Hotel des Bons Amis" was the name of the little inn at the other end of the village, where the long-haired driver was staying.

And all this was as Michel had expected, but he was not pleased that the coachman should be called Guiseppe Verdi. He was just as sure as before that

it was Ian Barr, who had adopted the Italian name; but if he had borrowed the licence of a real Giuseppe Verdi, and the licence were an Italian licence, there might be trouble and delay unless it could be indisputably proved to-night that the man was no other than Ian Barr.

CHAPTER XXII

"Miss Ricardo," Nora said after dinner, "I want very much to speak to Ian at once. I must speak to him."

Terry looked doubtful. "But if you're so afraid of his being discovered ——" she began.

Nora cut her short. "I know. You will think I'm never sure of my own mind. And of course when I begged you to let me carry out this plan, I told you I didn't mean ever to see him alone. You were simply an angel to take pity on me, and allow us this chance of being near each other for a few days, so that we might try to arrange for the future, and I oughtn't to take advantage of your goodness. *You* mustn't be drawn into trouble through us, whatever comes. Ian says that, and I feel it as much as he. But — I must talk to him alone to-night."

"Would it do if we sent, and had him come to the door here as if taking orders for to-morrow?" Terry asked. "Or perhaps he might come inside for five or six minutes, without its being thought odd, even by curious persons. I could go into my own room while you spoke together."

"I thought you would be angelic enough to suggest

something like that," said Nora. "But you see that *might* involve you, if harm came of it, and I don't believe Ian would consent, even if I would. While you were in your room — just while the waiter was clearing the table, I scribbled a few words in pencil, and sent them off. I told Ian to meet me in the garden at the back of the hotel, at a quarter past ten."

"Then I think you were very imprudent," exclaimed Terry. "As for involving me, that doesn't matter." She was tempted to add that her complicity in the plan of disguise had already involved her almost as deeply as she could be involved in the affair; but she would not point this out to the girl, who did not realize it fully.

"Oh, wait, dear Miss Ricardo, before you've made up your mind, until I've explained a little more," Nora pleaded. "I thought I could run down soon and sit on the balcony. Then, after awhile, say about ten, I could go into the garden and walk about as if to take a little exercise before bedtime. You see, it will be just too late for many people to be about, and too early for it to look odd that I should be out of doors, especially if I'd been sitting for awhile on the balcony already. Then, I don't need to speak with Ian more than three or four minutes. I've thought it all over, and there *can't* be any danger, can there — in a place like this? I begin to feel now that there's nobody watching us. I believe we've thrown off suspicion."

"There's probably no real danger. Still, I don't like it," said Terry.

"Neither do I like it," answered the girl. "But it's a choice between evils. And it's too late to change. Ian must have had my note a long time, and he may not be in his hotel. I shall have to go, you see."

"I suppose so," agreed Terry.

"Have I abused your kindness?" asked Nora, looking so lovely and so miserable that Terry's heart melted completely.

She had been caught by the romance of the strange plan the girl had proposed. And because her own first and last love had been broken abruptly and cruelly, when she was about Nora Verney's age, her sympathy with Nora in her tragic separation from her lover was almost morbidly intense. Terry had not received many confidences from the young girl; but she had been told that Nora was forced to part from Ian Barr; that their engagement had never been ended, nevertheless; that they had hoped to marry some day, "until that dreadful murder changed everything." With tears, and hands that clung to Terry's, the girl had sworn her certainty of Ian Barr's innocence. "All his motives in everything he had done were the noblest and bravest, and most unselfish," she had sobbed to her friend. "Because he *is* noble and unselfish, both our lives may be ruined, his and mine.

But we've had no time to plan things. Do help us. Do give us this one chance."

So Terry had given the one chance, hardly knowing whether she were right or wrong, or what was her position morally and legally. Sometimes she regretted what she had done; but as Nora asked, "Have I abused your kindness?" she was conscious of no regret. She and the girl kissed each other; and, wrapping a lace scarf round her head and shoulders, Nora Verney went down to sit on the balcony.

Hardly any one was there. Though a number of people were stopping in the hotel, they mostly sat in the reading-room, for fear of the night air, glancing at the papers or playing games, or else they went to bed in default of something more amusing to do.

Nora glanced about hurriedly, and was glad not to see Sir Ian Hereward or Major Smedley. Two German ladies were talking very fast and both at the same time about their babies and servants at home; and there was a young man, whom Terry and Nora had noticed once or twice following their road since Chamounix. If he had not been such an inoffensive, fussy little fellow, apparently a Frenchman of the *bourgeois* class, the girl might have regarded him with some anxiety; but she and Miss Ricardo had decided that he was a consumptive Frenchman who had been ordered to travel for his health. He had never appeared to take the slightest interest in them, or their move-

ments, and when Nora came out on to the balcony, he had apparently gone to sleep over a book, or else the high-hung electric lights had tired his eyes, for he had covered them with a plaid silk handkerchief such as — Nora thought pityingly — no human being except a very common foreigner would use.

She sat down under an electric light and pretended to read. The German ladies glanced at her, and then returned to their harrowing tale, that of a cook who had selfishly indulged in the measles. The young man did not wake up. Altogether, it seemed fantastic to trouble about taking precautions; nevertheless Nora faithfully carried out the programme she had detailed to Terry. She read for a while; then feigned to tire of her book, and leaned back, gazing over the hotel garden with a dreamy air. At last she rose, laid her book on the chair as if to keep her place, and began sauntering up and down the balcony. No one paid the slightest attention to her, but she continued to act her part, and presently seemed to hesitate at the top of the steps, whether to descend or stop where she was. Eventually she decided to descend slowly, rather listlessly, and to hover about below, examining the flowers, and smelling a rose here and there. Then she saw a path which pleased her, and strolled along it, disappearing from the sight of any one on the balcony who might happen to be observant.

The garden of this little hotel at St. Pierre de Char-

treuse was not walled in. It was a mere green setting which added charm to the house. There were flower-beds all round, back and front, under the verandah, and the rest was lawn, intersected by a few paths, and furnished with three or four cheap rustic seats where scarcely any one ever chose to sit. Nora walked to the seat farthest from the house, which was placed behind the shelter of a small buttress of rock, over which nasturtiums ran in gay riot.

The sky was sown with stars, otherwise the night was dark, and when Nora had sat down on the seat behind the rock, trees and bushes even at a short distance were blurred in shape, forming mere masses of black shadow. She was sure, however, that Ian Barr would find her, and he did, three minutes before the time appointed.

Neither spoke at first. The young man held out his arms, and the girl slipped into them. Still in silence she lifted her face, and he kissed her.

"Darling — precious darling!" he murmured.

"Oh, Ian," she breathed. "It's like Heaven to be in your arms again. The first time since—that awful day."

"Still, to have seen each other is something," he said. "It has been much to me. You can't realize how much."

"Yes, I can, by what I feel myself," she answered in a low, soft voice.

"These last three days have been worth years of life," he whispered.

"Yes — years of separation," she said. "But Ian,

we *can't* be separated. I can't live without you. I always thought so. I know it now. That's one thing I wanted to tell you again to-night — but it's not why I sent for you. Sir Ian is here."

"Here, in this hotel!"

"Yes. It was a surprise to Miss Ricardo, and to him to find us. But here he is. It *can't* be he has found out anything about you, and has been following?"

"Impossible," said Ian Barr. "Besides, he would do nothing."

"He might. How can we tell? He knows you are suspected. Anything to save himself, perhaps!"

"You don't know him!"

"Do *you* know him, Ian? After that day ——"

"Mr. Ian Barr, I believe," said an English voice, with a slight French roll of the "r's," speaking close to the lovers.

They started apart, and saw a small, slight figure step out from the shelter of the flower-draped rock.

"It's useless saying you're Giuseppe Verdi, for everything's known, and the game's up," went on the voice, that had a note of triumph in it. "You'd better not ——"

"Run!" advised the girl, sharply.

"If he does I'll shoot," said the little man. "*S'il vous plaît, Messieurs!*" He raised his tone, and two men in the uniform of French police appeared at the turn of the path.

As he remarked, "the game's up"; abandoning pretence, or any thought of escape, if he had had it, Ian Barr stood firmly by Nora's side.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked.

"I am Michel, of Scotland Yard," returned the other, shortly; and with a pang Nora recognized him as the fussy little French tourist, "travelling for his health."

"I have been following you for some time."

"You have been following *me!*" she exclaimed. "You coward — you sneak!"

"We get called hard names occasionally, but they break no bones," was Michel's nonchalant answer. "I'm very sorry, though, Miss Verney, to cause you annoyance."

"Please leave us, Nora," said Ian Barr.

"No, I can't. I couldn't bear it! Please don't send me away yet," she implored him, and for the moment Barr yielded.

"I suppose you want me as a witness in the Hereward case," he said to the detective. "Is that it?"

"That's what you were wanted for at the time of the first inquest," replied Michel. "It's more serious now. Owing to certain circumstances, there's a warrant out for your arrest in England."

"This isn't England."

"No. But you are charged with the murder of Lady Hereward; and you must know there's extradition for the crime of murder."

"All the same you have no power to arrest me on French soil."

"If you choose to make trouble for me, these gentlemen will ask to see your licence to drive in France. If you can't produce satisfactory evidence that you are entitled to any licence you may hold, they will arrest you for breach of French law."

Ian Barr laughed. "I see," he said. "That is well thought out. You are clever. If I wanted to fight, I could knock all three of you into cocked hats, and I think you must know that; but ——"

"You *don't* want to fight, first for the lady's sake and then because it would only make things worse for her and you afterward."

"Exactly."

"Oh, Ian, this is all my fault!" Nora cried, her voice agonized.

"No," he said, "it's the fault of Fate. Remember what I said about what the three days were worth. And remember *all* you promised me."

"What is going to happen now?" she asked.

"I am not arrested, but I am going to do whatever they want me to do, till I'm extradited. Afterward — well, I wish them joy of me!" Again he laughed, a strange laugh that had something of desperate courage as well as bitterness in it. And to Nora Verney it was like the knell of hope.

CHAPTER XXIII

Sir Ian Hereward had been out walking alone in the purple darkness, bareheaded, the breeze from the mountains spraying coolness against his hot forehead. He raised his face to it, as if to receive balm upon a burning wound.

A church clock struck somewhere in the distance. It was eleven. He thought that the hotel doors might be closing, and told himself dimly that he had better go back, unless he wanted to wake the tired concierge. He turned and, ten minutes later, as he was about to mount the steps of the deserted balcony, Nora Verney ran down to him.

"I have been waiting for you," she announced. "They said you were out."

"I hope you are going to tell me of some way in which I can serve you," he replied, kindly, yet with a slight constraint.

"If I dared to tell you!" she almost groaned.

"I think you may dare anything you can wish to dare with me," he answered.

"Oh, it isn't for fear of you I hesitate!" The words rushed from the girl's lips like a flood breaking down some barrier that had held it back. "It isn't that

at all, and I wouldn't have you think so. I don't dare talk to you about the only way in which you *could* serve me, because I have promised not. I've promised Ian Barr, beside whom you are a coward, Sir Ian, a coward."

She was beautiful in her fierce young defiance, under the stars, and Sir Ian looked at her pitifully, as he might have looked at an angry child. "By and by you will tell me why you waited," he said. "It was not for the pleasure of calling me a coward, I think."

"Ian — my Ian — has been arrested."

"Arrested — where?"

"Here. He was with me, in the garden."

Sir Ian remained silent for a few seconds, thinking. "Impossible to arrest him in France," he said at last.

"It wasn't exactly an arrest, but they laid a trap for him, an English detective and two French policemen — and he didn't resist. If it hadn't been for me, perhaps he could have escaped. I haven't told Miss Ricardo yet. I was afraid if I went in I might miss you."

"You want me to try and help Barr."

"Sir Ian, I can beg nothing of you. If I did, I should be breaking the most solemn promise. Ian trusts me, and would never love me again if I broke it; otherwise I would break it now."

"What can I do for him?"

The girl's eyes blazed. "You ask me — *me* — what you can do for him? Oh!"

"I don't understand you," Sir Ian said more coldly. "You have conceived a great horror of me. I quite see that. But if there is something I can do, you had better restrain your dislike enough to tell me clearly what it is."

"You *know* what you can do," Nora answered. "You can save Ian."

"I tried to do what I could that first day at the inquest, when —"

"You call *that* 'doing all you could,' when you *know* he is innocent — when you know who is guilty?"

Sir Ian turned on her in surprise tinged at last with anger, for she flung insult in his face, with tone and words.

"If you will have it," he retorted, "I do *not* know that Ian Barr is innocent."

"How dare you?" she cried, aghast. "You make me forget my promise to Ian. Now I know you don't mean to help, perhaps I shall be driven to break it to all the world. He will never forgive me — but at least I shall have saved him; and if I kill myself, what will the rest matter? Sir Ian Hereward, I warn you, if you try to harm instead of help your cousin, who gives himself for you, I will tell everything, in spite of my promise."

The soldier-face stiffened. "What do you know?" Sir Ian asked.

"We were together in the Tower," she answered. "We *heard*."

"Good God!" the words seemed to burst from him.

"Now you can guess what I think of you, when you say that you don't know if Ian is innocent."

"You swear to me that you were there together — Barr and you?" The man caught her hands, and held them, looking her in the eyes, though she struggled to free herself.

"I swear it to you. It depends on you, whether I swear it to others, or keep the silence I promised."

"If this is true, you perjured yourself at the inquest."

"Yes. Because Ian and I agreed to know nothing."

"Good Heavens! *If Ian Barr was there with you*, Nora, you don't know the difference it makes."

"What do you mean by the 'difference'?"

"I can't tell you what I mean. But you will know sooner or later. As you hope to save your soul — no, as you hope to save your lover's life, answer me this: Was he with you in the Tower until after the shots were fired?"

"As I hope to save Ian's life, he was with me in the Tower till after the shots were fired."

"Where were you both?"

"In the first floor room, first above — the other.

We couldn't hear every word that was spoken, but we heard — enough."

"My God! Then it was as I feared."

"I don't know what you mean," the girl said anxiously.

"Tell me the whole story," Sir Ian insisted. "How you got the key; why you were there, why Barr chose that day — everything."

"Yes, I will tell you. I may as well, now," she returned. "Ian had been making plans to go to America. He had heard of a chance. I wouldn't let him write to me at your house. I was afraid — that I'd never get the letters."

"You thought we would intercept them? How childish — and sensational!"

"Life *is* sensational. You ought to know that now! I didn't think you would stoop to such a thing. I liked and admired you very much, then; and Ian adored you for what he called your immense goodness to him, in spite of adverse circumstances and opposition from the one nearest you. But I did think Lady Hereward might do something. Even that she might have left instructions when she went to Paris, with one of the servants, to watch if I had letters. She detested Ian. She had the cruellest suspicions against him. He could have proved that she was wrong, I'm sure, if he would, though even to me he never told the truth about — about Liane. He only said that

he was innocent, and I believed him, but I have my own theory of what really did happen, and I believe I'm right."

"I am not asking you to tell me that," said Sir Ian, with a certain impatience. "I want to know why, and for how long, you and Barr were in the Tower together."

"He wrote me letters to the post-office in the village. Only the postmistress knew, I think. As a girl she was in my father's parish, and he was very good to her and her family. She was grateful; and Ian and I owe it to her that the gossip about his being seen the day — of the murder, was hushed up. Her daughter saw him, but afterward the mother induced her to forget, and it never could be found out where the rumour started. He wrote me that he would come and say good-bye. It was a long time since we had seen each other. We'd only met once before, since he gave up the stewardship. That time it was in the Tower, too, and we chose that place because it was so quiet and remote — hardly any one ever went there — and because it was the best for us, in many ways. Ian had the key."

"Oh! How did he come to have one? The key that was lent him once, he gave back when he finished his work."

"He had the key for a very simple reason. He told me all about it. One day he lost the borrowed

key, and was vexed with himself, so he ordered another one made. He got a locksmith to go up to the Tower ——"

"No doubt the police have learned that by this time."

"I suppose so. Anyway, after he'd had the new key a few days, he found the borrowed one, somewhere about the house. When he returned it, he kept the other, which used to be in the desk, he says, until he thought that some one was using it; after that he put it out of sight; but when he moved, he took the key away with him, thinking to use it, as he did, afterward — to open the Tower door, and meet me."

"Was it he who unlocked the door of the ground-floor room?"

"Yes. Because we had talked there, the first time we met; and he was in that lower room, waiting for me when I arrived, that second day — *the* day. But it smelt musty and damp, for the sun never gets in; so we went upstairs, and sat in the room above instead, where it was pleasanter. I'm sure, though, we did not leave the door open. We shut it after us, and I supposed then that Ian locked it; but it seems he forgot. We were making plans for his going to America, and sending for me, when we heard voices. *You know whose.*"

"Well?"

"From the first the conversation was so very terrible that we couldn't let it be known that we were there. We looked at each other, and Ian whispered to me that we must just bear it and try to forget afterward. He said almost anything would be better than *she* should know who had heard such secrets. She would hate her life, only thinking that we knew. And of course we meant never to tell — never to even speak of it again to each other. Sometimes there would be blanks — sentences we didn't hear, sometimes silence, and then those most awful, awful sobbings. At last — came the two shots, one right after the other. I felt as if I should faint, and I did almost. I felt myself falling, but Ian caught me in his arms and held me up. For a few minutes I think I wasn't wholly conscious, but I never quite fainted, for I know Ian had me in his arms all the time; and when I came back to myself he was holding me still."

"What then?" Sir Ian's voice was hoarse, as if his lips and tongue were dry.

"I listened for a while, and there wasn't a sound. It seemed a ghastly kind of silence, after what had happened. At last I whispered to Ian, and asked what he thought of the shots. He answered that he was afraid they could mean only one thing, but he would go down and look. I said if he went I would go too. He must not go alone, because, if any one else had heard the shots, and came to see, it might be

thought that he — had had something to do with the thing. That idea came to me even then, because everybody talked about the way Lady Hereward felt toward Ian, and how it was through her he gave up his place. I begged him to take me, and said I couldn't stay upstairs, alone. I told him I could bear whatever we might have to see. So I went down the stairs behind Ian, and we found the door of the ground-floor room a little open. Ian said, 'I must have forgotten to lock it!' You see from what we heard, we weren't quite sure whether the voices came from the inside of the Tower or outside. We couldn't have seen from the one window in our room, anyway, even if we had looked out, which of course we didn't. It was bad enough to *hear* such things; but as there was no glass in the window, which had been broken a long time, we couldn't shut out the sounds. When Ian pushed the door wider open, I peeped over his shoulder, and — *I saw her*. Oh, the look in her staring eyes! It was too agonizing. I forgave her everything, and I hated you. I have hated you ever since."

"You can't hate me more than I hate myself," Sir Ian groaned. But the bitter anguish in face and voice waked no pity in the girl's heart, full of gentle compassion for others.

"We saw at once she was dead. There *couldn't* be any mistake in an expression like that. I pulled

Ian back, and begged him not to go into the room. He too, thought there was no need, indeed that it would be best not, for every one concerned. We didn't see anything that had been stolen, or think about a revolver. Ian said we must go away, and he must get out of England at once to avoid being called as witness — for whatever came no one must know as long as ever we lived, that we had heard and seen. It wasn't himself that he thought about. *It was you.* But I thought of him as well, and I knew if we weren't able to explain by telling the real truth, he might be in great danger. I began to say something of that sort to him, but he broke in and made me promise that I wouldn't tell, even to shield him if he were in trouble. Then, in his turn, he promised that he would not go as far from me as America — not for a while, anyhow. He would try to get to France, and keep out of the way there, till perhaps it might be safe to sail for America later. He realized that both our lives might be ruined; that — he might be suspected — hunted — even for years; but for your sake he didn't hesitate. We planned quickly that he should get his bicycle, on which he'd come from London, and wheel it through the woods, as you know one can do there, for miles, until he'd gone far beyond Riding St. Mary, or any place where he was likely to be recognized. Then, at Godalton he would catch a train for Southampton; and unless an alarm had been raised already,

he believed he could get to St. Malo in a fishing-smack from close by Southampton, at a tiny place where he used to stay with his mother, as a boy, sometimes. He knew a family of fishermen there, who would help him. Ian was sure he could trust them not to tell, even if there should be a hue and cry; and they never did tell. He said he would take his mother's name, O'Reilly, and I must write him, Poste Restante, Cherbourg, where he hoped to go eventually, and would disguise himself as best he could, if things came to the worst. He saw all that happened, in the papers of course, but I couldn't write him till Miss Ricardo and I reached Paris. I told him in a letter I posted then where we meant to stay, and he went to Aosta, and bribed a man named Guiseppe Verdi to let him a carriage and horses, and lend his licence, so that he could be with me for a little while, driving our carriage. Now you know the whole story. Through my fault he will be taken back to England, and tried for murdering Lady Hereward — since you are so cruel and so cowardly."

"Judge not," said Sir Ian.

"What does it matter to you whether I judge or not?"

"There are others of more importance than you, in this," he admitted, his eyes far away.

"If only you were not a coward!" she continued to taunt him, hoping to goad the man, perhaps, to

the course she longed to see him take. "Of all things, I never thought you a coward, in old days."

"You, at least, are no coward," he said. "After what you tell me you saw and heard, you came back to Friars' Moat, and poured tea for us in the drawing-room."

"You forced me to come in," she protested. "I felt as if I should die. It seemed then as if the world had come to an end."

"Yes," Sir Ian repeated dreamily. "Yes. It seemed as if the world had come to an end. I wish it had."

"It would have been better for you!" Nora exclaimed. "Will you go to England, and at least do what you can for Ian, without endangering yourself?"

"Yes, I will go to England," he echoed, "and do what I can for Ian. As you say, there may be — something."

Before she could answer, Terry Ricardo's voice called her from the balcony above. "Is that you Nora, with Sir Ian?"

"Yes," replied the girl, startled.

"I'm thankful!" cried Terry. "I was anxious about you, Nora. You were so long away. Is all well?"

"No. All is not well," Nora returned, her voice breaking sharply.

"Oh! Aren't you coming to tell me?"

"Yes, I'm coming." The girl turned to Sir Ian,

and almost hissed at him, in a sibilant whisper, "Don't be afraid, *coward!* I am not going to tell *your* part."

He drew away from her, standing very straight and tall, his head up. But when Terry had bidden him "Good night," and both women had gone in, his chin dropped, and a long sigh came shuddering from his breast.

CHAPTER XXIV

The day "Cupid" heard that Ian Barr had been trapped in France, he made a "find" in the View Tower.

Although the police had reported at first that nothing was visible there which could afford a clue to the mystery, except in the room on the ground floor, Gaylor had never been satisfied. He wanted, if possible, to have a clear case against Barr, whom he now believed to be the murderer of Lady Hereward; and if he could come across any proof that Barr had been in the habit of using the Tower just before the tragedy, it would be a score. Consequently he searched, with the idea ever before him; and from far down between the seat and back of the battered, couch-like sofa in the upper room, he prized out a hairpin.

This was on the afternoon of the day when the news had come from France; and the best thing about the trophy, from the detective's point of view, was that the hairpin appeared to be a new one.

If it had been old, it might have fallen from some woman's head months or years before, and worked its way down into the sofa; but it was new; and it had a certain individuality of its own. As no woman had

entered the Tower since the murder, it was clear that one must have been there, in the upper room, not very long before the day of Lady Hereward's death, if not on the day itself; and the question arose in Gaylor's mind: Was it a woman whom Barr had gone there to meet?

Naturally, he thought of Miss Verney, whose statements at the inquest had been so unsatisfactory. Now, as he had just heard, Barr had been caught with her in France, and it seemed more than ever probable that she and the young man had been together on the afternoon of the murder. It occurred to Gaylor that the girl might even be an accomplice, for Lady Hereward had separated her from her lover, temporarily at least, and caused Barr to forfeit the means of supporting a wife.

The hairpin, Gaylor thought, might very well be hers. She had red-gold hair; and this was not a common, black hairpin, but a golden brown one, wound with fine brown silk, so as to resemble the texture of hair. No woman with dark hair would choose to wear such a thing.

He put it in his pocket; and when he went back to the farmhouse for tea he brought out the hairpin, and showed it to his hostess.

"I suppose this isn't yours, is it, Mrs. Barnard?" he inquired.

"Well! Wherever did you pick that up?" Rose

wanted to know, with an eagerness which instantly convinced Gaylor that she had seen such hairpins before, and was surprised to see this one now. He replied, teasingly, that he would tell her where he had found it, when she told him whose it was.

Mrs. Barnard temporized. "Was it in this room?"

"What do you think?" questioned the young man, with his innocent, dimpled smile.

"Well, it would be the strangest thing if it were here, considering never a morning goes by but the whole place is swept."

"Ah, then it's several days since the person has been to see you?"

"You do catch one up quick," said Rose. "Neither of the persons has set foot in this house for weeks, then, since you put it that way."

"Do two ladies of your acquaintance use this sort of silky brown hairpin?" asked Gaylor, not hiding his astonishment.

"One of them's not what you'd call a lady," said Rose, "but the other *was*."

"Was? She is dead, then? Do you mean Lady Hereward?"

"Yes. She used always to have hairpins like that. She would not let her maid put any other kind in her hair. These just matched it."

Gaylor was as much astonished as it was in his experienced soul to be. He had not once thought of Lady

Hereward. Could it be, he asked himself, that she had gone to the upper room of the Tower the day she was murdered? Or had she perhaps been in the habit of going there, unknown to her husband and other members of the household at Friars' Moat? This idea upset his theories, but he could fit it in, in several different ways, doubtless, when he had had time to think the puzzle out. Lady Hereward might have been induced to visit the tower by a letter from Ian Barr, either signed or anonymous. Or it might still be that Miss Verney was the other who used the brown silk hairpins, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Barnard described that person as "not what you'd call a lady."

"Has Miss Verney a fancy for the same sort of pins?" the detective asked, with boyish slyness which was engaging rather than repulsive.

"Dear me, no, they'd be the wrong shade for her hair," replied Rose, scorning his masculine ignorance. "I don't know what sort of hairpins she wears, I'm sure, but she wouldn't choose this sort, anyway."

"How do you know about Lady Hereward? Did you ever notice them in her hair?"

"No, I can't say I did, though she came here fairly often, to leave some little present for Poppet. She was very kind to Poppet, yet the queer thing is, the child never cared for her. Her ladyship seemed to know that, and have a kind of pride in trying to gain the little thing's affection. But she never could."

"Poppet isn't the type of child whose love could be forced," remarked Gaylor, to Rose's delight. "About this hairpin, though. You might as well tell me who is the 'other person,' if not Miss Verney."

"Why, if you must know, it's Kate Craigie. I hope you haven't got any horrid, secret reason for wanting to find out? You see, it's just not *impossible* that a hairpin dropped here by Lady Hereward or Kate *might* have stuck in a rug, in spite of all the sweepings; but Kate was so cross with my little Poppet for letting out things to you that she's never been inside the house since the afternoon her poor ladyship was done away with."

"I didn't say I'd found the hairpin here," Gaylor remarked. "But I'm sure those hairpins don't match Kate Craigie's hair, since you say women are so keen on a match in such things. Hers is almost black. Why should she choose them, if Miss Verney wouldn't?"

"That's different," Rose informed him. "Miss Verney's hair is one of her greatest beauties, and she must know that, though she's not a vain young lady. Gilt hairpins are as cheap to buy as dark ones. She'd either be careless, and get black, or else she'd have yellow of the right shade, nothing in between; do you see? But Kate, being about her mistress's room a great deal, if she was wanting a hairpin would stick in one of her ladyship's, or even help herself to a handful if she'd forgotten to buy her own sort. No harm

in that. All ladies' maids do it, I expect. It was Kate who told me of Lady Hereward's being so fond of her brown silk kind. One day here Kate was trying a new way of doing her hair, after a picture in a fashion book I had, and Poppet — observing little puss! — noticed those lightish, silk-covered hairpins among the common black sort, on my dressing-table."

"No harm, of course," said the detective, consoling Rose, who looked anxious. But he was disturbed in mind. All his calculations trembled like a card-house built too high, at the thought that Kate Craigie might have been secretly in the habit of visiting the View Tower. What if, after all, the evidence against Ian Barr should come to nothing, and the wind of suspicion should veer back to Edward, the footman, lover of Lady Hereward's maid and enemy of Lady Hereward? At best, the evidence against Barr, black as it looked, remained even now entirely circumstantial.

Gaylor had been working industriously up to the point he had reached, and it was partly due to his advice that Barr had been so successfully trapped in France. The late steward of Friars' Moat would be "extradited" back to England in a day or two, and Gaylor had expected to have an almost impregnable case built up against him. It would be a blow to find, just before the arrival of the prisoner, who owed his arrest largely to Gaylor's discoveries as well as suggestions, that the case was not so strong after all.

This contingency had to be faced, however, and the detective faced it. If there were to be new developments, he wanted to be the one to develop them, and spring them upon Scotland Yard and an eager public, instead of having them sprung upon him.

As he sat thinking, lost for the moment to all consciousness of Mrs. Barnard's presence, a knock sounded at the door. Rose went to open it, Gaylor scarcely hearing. A moment later she came back to him, a telegram in her hand.

CHAPTER XXV

GAYLOR tore open the brick-coloured envelope, without eagerness, for he received as well as sent many telegrams, and he was expecting an answer to one of no vast importance. But as he read the cipher message, the blood rushed up to his ears, tingling.

"Gold case answering description of Lady Hereward's missing vanity box at Ebbitt's, pawnbroker Brownell Street, Westbourne Grove. Call headquarters and receive instructions. Immediate.

"BURROWS."

This was news indeed!

Burrows was at the head of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard; and Gaylor felt he might consider it a compliment to his previous work that he should be sent for in haste. What the "instructions" might be he could not guess; but he was glad the discovery of the brown hairpin had been made before he was obliged to leave for town.

He had a bicycle which took him to the nearest railway-station, and in half an hour he was in a quick train, on his way up to London. Another twenty minutes, and he had in his hand a gold case like a cigarette-case, set at the left upper corner with a small

sapphire, round which rays as of a star were indicated in tiny brilliants.

There was a chain attached, and inside the case was a mirror, behind which was a thin bit of ivory for memoranda, and a little claw of gold to hold a film of handkerchief. On the other side was a receptacle for a powder-puff, another for lip-salve, and a third for pins, or what-not. The powder-puff was faintly stained with pink, and there were traces of pale rose-coloured paste in the miniature box intended for lip-salve.

The story of the finding of the vanity box redounded more to the credit of an honest pawnbroker than to that of the police; for, though all Europe was being ransacked for Lady Hereward's lost jewels — the rings, the brooch and the gold case which had disappeared at the time of her mysterious murder — until now no news had been obtained of any of the missing valuables. All pawnbrokers had an exact description of the jewels and the vanity box, but it was only to-day that one of the number had sent a communication to Scotland Yard; and unfortunately the statement Ebbitt of Westbourne Grove had made was so mutilated as to be far from satisfactory.

Ebbitt, it seemed, had been away on a honeymoon, of three days' duration. His principal assistant had been suffering from toothache, and the vanity box was pledged to a youth new to the business. This

young man had been duly shown the description of Lady Hereward's jewelry, when it was first supplied by Scotland Yard; but this little gold case being so like many others of its kind, he had failed to associate it with the Hereward affair. Nothing was thought of the matter in the office until Ebbitt, the principal, returned, early in the afternoon of the day on which Gaylor received his telegram from Scotland Yard.

Ebbitt, acquainting himself with the business transactions which had taken place during his absence, at once saw the resemblance between the vanity box in his safe and the description of that which was "wanted" by the police. He lost no time, therefore, in sending to Scotland Yard; but the only information concerning the person who had pledged the gold case was the fact that she was a woman, rather tall, rather slender, rather well dressed in something black or very dark, and wearing a thick motor veil. The youth who had received the vanity box, at the busiest hour of the day, had "not had time" to think much about the woman. He had, however, taken her for a lady in reduced circumstances, who wore a thick veil because she did not want her face to be seen when she entered a pawnbroker's. There were many such! She had willingly agreed to a loan of five pounds, and had spoken as little as possible, in a low tone, almost a whisper. That was usual also, in the circumstances. If she had been frightened or anxious

to get away, he had not noticed, though on being questioned, he thought that the lady had tried to disguise her voice. Exactly why this impression — if it really amounted to an impression — remained in his mind the young man could not be sure. He did not remember any marked peculiarity in the woman's voice, more than in her manner. Still, there must have been something — if he could only recall it. So far as he could say, the woman had never been in the place before. She had given the name of Mrs. Bayneson, and an address, Deodar Crescent, Westbourne Grove. But no such street as Deodar Crescent existed in Westbourne Grove or its neighbourhood, and up to the time of Gaylor's arrival at headquarters no one of the name of Bayneson (spelled as the client of the Brownell Street pawnbroker spelled it) had been discovered. Of course, however, it was not to be supposed that a person disposing of Lady Hereward's property would give her true name and address; the police had not expected to find her by means of such a simple clue as that. Gaylor had been sent for, to tell whether his latest discoveries in the neighbourhood of Riding St. Mary would tend to throw light upon the mystery of the pawned vanity box.

Suddenly a blinding flash seemed to illumine the detective's brain. But the twilight of bewilderment could not thus have been made bright without the finding of the brown silk hairpin, and the conversation

which had followed with Mrs. Barnard. Gaylor could have shouted with joy, for the inspiration he believed had come to him would but incriminate Ian Barr the more hopelessly. He adored himself for unearthing that precious hairpin, and for every question he had put to the farmer's wife. It was providential that the summons to London had not come two hours earlier.

"I'll tell you exactly who pawned that little gold box — if it is Lady Hereward's," said he to his superior. "It's the late wearer of that hairpin," and he took from his pocket a handkerchief, in an end of which he had carefully wrapped the trophy of the View Tower.

"That comes from the upper room of the place where Lady Hereward was murdered," he added, proud of the light of interest in the great man's eyes, which complimented the *coup* he was about to describe. "I can tell you, too," Gaylor went on, "the first name of the woman: Liane."

"The lady's maid who disappeared!"

Burrows remembered at once the connection which the name of Liane had already with the Hereward case. "By what line exactly do you reach that conclusion — for I see what's in your mind?"

Gaylor was only just assembling his battalion of deductions and arguments; but he responded promptly. "Why, in the first place, I know that the maid who took Liane's place was in the habit of using her mis-

tress's hairpins when she wanted any. Although they didn't suit the colour of her hair, they saved expense and bother. All lady's maids, it seems, do the same thing, without thinking it dishonest. To how much greater extent would a French girl be likely to take advantage of any such little opportunities to save her purse and her legs, than a sturdy Englishwoman? Besides, when I first went down to Riding St. Mary, I once had the curiosity to get Liane described to me by Mrs. Barnard, my landlady. The girl had big black eyes she said, that looked all the blacker in contrast with the chestnut-coloured hair which she dressed very becomingly, and which many people thought bleached from a much darker shade. This sort of pin wouldn't be out of the way in chestnut hair, no matter how fastidious the young woman might be.

"Secondly, the cause of the open quarrel between Lady Hereward and Barr, was Liane. Lady Hereward accused him of flirting with the French girl, causing her to leave the place where she was valued and generously treated. The question in my mind up to now was, whether or no Lady Hereward was right; for apparently soon after Barr fell in love with Miss Verney, who is much handsomer than Liane, besides being a lady. However, a man can love two women at once, as has been proved times without number; and I begin to think that her ladyship knew what she was talking about. Barr certainly was in

the habit of going to the View Tower, and maybe it was to meet Liane, who most likely dropped this hairpin on one of her last visits there. If he was in communication with her, and feared suspicion falling on him after the murder (we know he *did* fear that or he would not have got out of the way so smartly), what more natural than he should hand the jewels over to the girl — maybe confiding the whole story to her? No doubt he has ordered her to hang on to everything like grim death, or she would probably have pawned some of the things before this. But if she was in difficulties, she might have been tempted to get rid of this vanity box — the least remarkable piece in the lot. And the curious quality in the veiled woman's voice, which the assistant couldn't clearly remember, must have been a slight French accent, which she would have tried to disguise as best she could. And it would have been slight, as I believe Liane had lived a number of years in England. Friars' Moat wasn't her first place."

"You make your points," said Burrows.

"Another thing, if another was needed, to make me think the woman at the pawnbroker's must have been Liane," continued Gaylor, "is the name and address she gave. Now, I'm fairly observant, I hope. I went down to Riding St. Mary on purpose to observe, and I observed a lot of little things which didn't seem to have any particular bearing on the case. They went in with the rest, like a 'mixed lot' at a sale. I noticed

names of places and streets and people. Below the village, and the house Barr occupied as steward on the Friars' Moat estate, is a small house, a sort of cross between a villa and a cottage, standing in a garden on the highroad. Liane must have passed it constantly. It's called Deodar Lodge; and the man who lived there, up till a short time ago, was named Ernest Bayne — a writer for socialist papers, and an intimate friend of Ian Barr's. You see the likelihood, don't you, that a Frenchwoman — unused to pawnshops, afraid of being caught, yet nerved by necessity — would snatch at anything familiar that sprang into her head, when hearing that she was obliged to give name and address? The fact that she wasn't English herself would make her cautious to choose something she felt *sure* was quite English, lest she should make a mistake, and rouse suspicion. She suddenly found herself thinking of Bayne and Deodar Lodge; so she changed Bayne into Bayneson, unconscious that she'd hit upon a weird sort of combination. And as she's very likely living in lodgings in some Crescent, in Westbourne Grove, she tacked that on to her Deodar."

"That hangs together plausibly," said Burrows, pleased with the young man's building up of one deduction on another. "I suppose you think she's in Westbourne Grove because she went to a small place like Ebbitt's, of whose existence she wouldn't have known unless she'd happen to pass it."

"Exactly," replied Gaylor.

"Can you get this Liane's photograph?"

"I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Barnard of the Home Farm, or some one among the servants at Friars' Moat has it — if she ever had any taken; and it's likely she did, as she was said to be vain. Possibly she may have sat to the local photographer. In this case, he'll have the negative."

"When the girl disappeared some months ago, apparently neither Lady Hereward nor her husband applied to the police."

"No, I don't think they believed it a case for police interference. Lady Hereward may have said some hasty things to Barr, when she was in a rage with him, but there was no real idea that the French maid had met with foul play. Barr may have helped her with a little money, until after the murder, since when I should say he'd had his hands full — and perhaps his pockets empty. If supplies from him were stopped, that would account for the girl's pawning the vanity box."

"Of course we aren't absolutely certain yet that this thing's the one we've been after," remarked Burrows, indicating the little gold case in his desk. "It hasn't been identified by any one who knew Lady Hereward, though it answers the description. Unfortunately, there's nothing very distinctive about it. But Sir Ian Hereward arrives this evening, seven o'clock, Victoria

Station. I thought of sending you to meet him; but the best thing you can do is to get on the track of Liane. Menzies can meet Sir Ian."

"My name isn't Gaylor if I don't find her by the time they've landed Barr at Dover," said the young detective, who was now in such good spirits that he couldn't resist the temptation to boast a little. "I think you can rely on me."

"You can have any help you want," suggested his superior.

"Thank you, but I should like to do it on my own."

CHAPTER XXVI

Terry Ricardo was curiously anxious about Sir Ian. Her anxiety amounted to a presentiment of evil; but what kind of evil she could not define.

The morning after her arrival with Nora Verney at St. Pierre de Chartreuse, he bade her good-bye, saying that he must return immediately to England. And she did not remind him that he had said, because of Major Smedley, he would remain at St. Pierre for a day or two longer.

Of course, everything was different now, on account of Ian Barr. Sir Ian did not say that Barr's fate had anything to do with his change of plan, but Terry was sure it had, just as much as it had to do with hers.

The annoyance that they had both suffered from Major Smedley's arrival appeared as nothing now, looked back upon after the sensational incident of the evening. It did not seem to matter much, somehow, Terry thought, what Major Smedley thought or did; so it could hardly be fear of trouble from that quarter which had altered Sir Ian's looks for the worse since the night before.

He had been haggard then, but he was more haggard now, and it was far truer of him to-day than it had been

when the thought first came into her mind, that he had the air of a man haunted.

In saying farewell, his eyes lingered with a kind of anguished longing on Terry's face — the face that he had once pronounced "fascinating rather than beautiful"; the face whose resemblance he had been wont to seek in the old portrait at Riding Wood House.

"Why, you look at me as if we were never going to meet again!" she exclaimed, on a frightened impulse, as he wrung her hand.

"Perhaps we never shall," he answered. "One can't be sure, can one?"

"But I have promised Nora to go back to England at once," said Terry. "Fate is against my staying more than twenty-four hours at dear St. Pierre de Chartreuse, it seems. But never mind! I have seen the sweet little place again — and talked to you here. I shall have another good memory. And we shall meet in England soon. You know, Ian, I want to be your friend."

"I could never be your friend, Terry," he protested.

"Nonsense! You said 'nonsense' to me once. I say it to you now. Please tell me where you will be in England. Not at ——"

"Friars' Moat? Oh, no! I can't bear the thought of the place. I don't know where I shall go."

"Oh, how dreary not to know! You have many friends, who must have asked you to their houses

because they wanted you to be with them, and let them comfort you."

"No one can comfort me."

"Not yet. But by and by it will be different. Won't you stay with some friends near — Riding St. Mary?"

"I couldn't do that. I think I shall go straight to a London hotel."

"Which one? I want to know," Terry persisted, "because I might wish to write to you."

His face brightened faintly. "Would you write to me?" he asked. "I — should like to have a letter from you."

"What about?" Terry inquired, smiling.

"Anything! Just to hear from you. To have a letter."

"You shall have one," she assured him. "As good a letter as I know how to write. The letter of a friend to a friend."

"Will you write it on the boat, or in the train between Dover and London, and post it when you get to town?" Sir Ian pleaded anxiously.

"Why on the boat or in the train?"

"Because I should like to have the thoughts almost warm from your hand, when they reach me."

"I could write it after arriving in London, if you want them so very fresh."

"No," said Sir Ian. "Please post the letter immedi-

ately on your arrival. I might be gone from the address I shall give you, if you didn't do that."

"Very well," Terry consented, "I will post it immediately, or send it by messenger."

"Thank you with all my heart for the promise. Address me at Harland's Hotel, Charles Street, Pall Mall."

"I never heard of it," said Terry. "Is it a new hotel, since my day?"

"No, it's very old, I believe. But it's small and insignificant. Comparatively few people know of its existence. It's not a very bright or gay place; but for that reason it will suit me the better now. And you? Shall you go to Mrs. Ricardo?"

"I am not sure," Terry replied. "I haven't talked it over with Nora yet; but as I've taken charge of her for the present, I must arrange for her welfare. I expected to have stopped over here longer, and there seemed plenty of time to settle about the future. Now there's none. I think of wiring Maud to ask if she will invite Nora to White Fields. I'm almost sure that if I do, she will. Meanwhile, though, I may put up at an hotel in town for a night or two."

"Don't," Sir Ian said quickly. "I hope you won't do that."

She looked surprised. "Why? Are you so old-fashioned that you dislike the thought of women being in a hotel alone?"

"No — yes," he answered disjointedly. "Couldn't you promise not to stop in town, but to go at once to the country?"

Bewildered, Terry replied that, to please him, she would do as he suggested, if she possibly could, though she was unable to imagine what his reason could be.

"You'll hear later," he began, then changed his sentence. "I will give you my reason later," he amended. "I know I've no right to dictate, or even to ask a favour — but if you would do me this last one ——"

"This last one?" she echoed.

"I mean," and he smiled faintly, "that I'll try not to ask others."

Terry lightly responded that she liked her friends to ask favours of her, and took it as a compliment. But when Sir Ian had gone, and she tried to analyze the anxious feeling she had, these words of his, and other somewhat strange expressions he had used in their conversation, came back to her.

She and Nora Verney did not leave St. Pierre de Chartreuse till that night, twelve hours after Sir Ian Hereward. They shared a compartment in a *wagon lit*, but neither slept. The mind of each was tenanted, almost to the exclusion of other thoughts, by the image of a man; and the two men were of the same blood and the same name.

"Why doesn't he want me to stop for even one night

in London, where he will be?" Terry asked herself. She wondered if it could possibly be on account of Major Smedley, who chose to take his departure from St. Pierre de Chartreuse at the hour when Sir Ian went; but she could scarcely believe it was because of the old mischief-maker. London was a large place. Even Major Smedley could not find fault with them for being in London at the same time; and in any case he could say no worse things than he was prepared to say now.

At Paris Nora was so ill with a terrible nervous headache that Terry feared congestion of the brain for the girl. It was not possible to go on; so, thinking of Sir Ian and the letter he would be expecting, she telegraphed him that she was unavoidably delayed. "Will wire again after seeing doctor, when we shall be able to start," she added.

Next day Nora was better, and, though very weak, insisted that she was able to travel, grew feverish at the suggestion of being detained longer, and at last forced the French doctor, called in by Miss Ricardo, to consent to her wish with a shrug of the shoulders. "She may grow worse if we compel her to wait. She is a true woman," he said to Terry, with the smile of a much-enduring, much-experienced medical man.

Accordingly, the girl had her way, and they left Paris on the eleven o'clock train. Terry was by this time almost as anxious to get on as Nora herself,

though she had tried conscientiously to resign herself to the necessity of stopping. She wired again to Sir Ian, and thought of him continually, with the same heavy presentiment of — she knew not what. Again and again she accused herself of foolish superstition, but she could not put away the feeling that he was calling to her. It was as if she could hear his voice crying out of a great darkness, "Terry! Terry! Good-bye!"

Any observant person, a student of life and human character, would have noticed the two travellers with a particular interest, sharpened to curiosity. An unobservant person would merely have seen a young woman and a girl journeying together; the woman gracious and distinguished in appearance, with supreme charm of individuality; the girl brilliantly beautiful, with cheeks like roses and blue eyes like stars. He would have seen that they were well but simply dressed, that they did not trouble to talk to each other much, though they seemed on friendly terms, and that both were rather tired of travelling, or impatient to reach England. The observant person, however, would have seen far more. He would have seen that the woman's pallor and the girl's roses were caused by the same almost unbearable anxiety; that their quiet manner was retained only by desperate efforts at self-control. He would have guessed that each wished to hide her excitement from the other, and that they

talked little because there was a tabooed subject, to which each one gave her whole thought. He would have guessed at a moving romance or tragedy which shaped the lives of both, and drew them toward a common goal.

By this time Ian Barr was in England, and Nora's great desire was to find out what had happened to him there. Her own conduct was to be determined by Sir Ian Hereward's. *Her* Ian would be silent to the end, whatever it might be, she was only too sure. But if Sir Ian Hereward kept silence, she would not. She would speak, even though the breaking of her promise meant the end of Ian's love.

"They shan't kill him — they shan't kill him!" the panting of the engine said for her, in train and boat.

She could hardly wait to get to Dover, because there they would see the evening papers. There might be news of some sort, good or bad, in them. She felt there would be news. Big black headlines danced before her eyes: "Sir Ian Hereward Confesses to the Murder of his Wife." And, as a hideous alternative: "Evidence Piles Up Against Ian Barr. Damaging Statements by Sir Ian Hereward."

What if, with the best will in the world to break her promise, to tell all the truth as she had told it to Sir Ian, *his* word should be believed against hers, with

Ian Barr silent, refusing to corroborate her, refusing to defend himself at Sir Ian's expense.

The girl shivered as if with ague, when this thought crawled into her mind, cold and sly as an adder. It might be so! It might be so! She would want to kill Sir Ian. But that would not save her lover. Perhaps nothing could save him, after all.

CHAPTER XXVII

"Evening papers! Standard! Globe!" called a shrill little voice along the platform at Dover, where the long train was filling with passengers from the Channel boat.

Terry was dominated by her vague fears for Sir Ian, and she did not realize that the evening papers might be of unusual importance to her or Nora Verney. She was thinking what she should say in her letter to Sir Ian, which she intended to begin as soon as she was settled in her place in the train. She had a stylographic pen and writing-case in her dressing-bag, and was anxious to put her thoughts on paper. She meant to say kind and cheering things to Sir Ian; and to save delay she would send the letter by messenger from somewhere near Victoria.

A porter put the ladies' small luggage into a first-class carriage, spreading it about, as clever porters will, in the hope of keeping out other passengers.

"Come, Nora," said Terry. "He's got our places. Would you like tea?"

But Nora did not move or answer, because she did not hear. She had bought a paper and was standing on the platform, in everybody's way, eagerly reading

something on the middle page. Terry had to touch the girl on the arm to rouse her. Then she started and, crumpling the paper in her hand followed Miss Ricardo to the door of their compartment with a bewildered air.

"What is the matter?" Terry asked, when the porter was paid and dismissed.

"The paper," said Nora dazedly. "They've found Liane, and arrested her — this morning."

"Oh!" cried Terry, with a quickening of her tired pulses. "*Arrested* her? Does that mean — will it save your Ian?"

"I don't know," answered Nora. "Perhaps I'm stupid. But I can't see that it will help him much. Please read, and tell me what you think."

Forgetting the letter which she had been so eager to begin, Terry took the paper from Nora's hand. It was open at the middle, most important page, and in the most conspicuous position appeared two columns under a sensationally large double heading:

"Another Startling Development in the Hereward Murder Mystery. Pawning of the Lost 'Vanity Box.' Arrest of Vanished French Maid. Her Extraordinary Confession."

The blood began to knock at Terry Ricardo's temples. She plunged into the news as Nora had, oblivious of everything else, as the girl had been. Nora watched her anxiously, as she read on.

Liane Rodache had been found by the "smart young detective, Gaylor," living in lodgings in Moreton Crescent, Westbourne Grove, and arrested on suspicion of complicity in the murder of Lady Hereward. She had confessed to pawning the gold vanity box which had led to her discovery; and it had been identified by Sir Ian Hereward on his return from France, as the property of his late wife. Liane had been run to earth by Gaylor with the help of a photograph made at Havershall, Surrey, although her appearance had greatly changed since the portrait was taken. Her hair, auburn formerly, had been allowed to resume its natural dark brown. Her complexion was sallow, rather than brilliant, as it had been. She was thin to the point of emaciation, and showed signs of having passed through a severe illness. Her story was elaborate, and if true, exonerated Barr from one charge, at least; that made against him by Lady Hereward. Denying that Barr had ever been her lover, Liane accused his intimate friend, a young socialist author and newspaper writer, named Ernest Bayne, late of Deodar Lodge, near Riding St. Mary.

This young man had French blood in his veins. His mother, a French girl of good birth, had married an English commercial traveller, who, losing his position through illness, had become impoverished during the son's boyhood. The youth had been clever, had conquered many difficulties, and succeeded as

a writer. When about twenty-four, two or three years before the meeting with Liane, he had brought his mother, an invalid, to live in the country, taking Deodar Lodge which was then to let. Political opinions had drawn the two young men together, and they became intimate friends. Liane had made Bayne's acquaintance one day in the train, on the way to London, where she had to carry out a commission for Lady Hereward. The French girl had been late and would have missed her train, if Bayne had not opened the door of his compartment and pulled her in. They had conversed in French, and from that day were on the most friendly terms, though their acquaintance was kept secret, even from Barr. Later, however, Barr had found it out by accident. Bayne was ill, and Liane, anxious for news of him, called one evening to make inquiries at his house, though forbidden to go there, as he was not proud of his engagement to a girl in service, no matter how fascinating. Barr was looking after his friend, and had opened the door. Liane knowing of their intimacy, excused her anxiety by saying that she was engaged to Ernest Bayne. Afterward Bayne had denied the engagement; but Barr had strongly advised him to be brave and keep it, since they loved each other. A difference of opinion had somewhat disturbed the friendship, and Liane had several times called after dark, at the steward's to tell him of her troubles, and beg him to use all his

influence with Ernest. Before this time Ernest's mother died and when he suddenly left Deodar Lodge, without warning Liane of his intention, she implored Ian Barr to say where his friend had gone; but, apparently with reluctance, he refused, pleading that to do so would be a betrayal of confidence. Certain that he corresponded with Bayne, Liane went to the steward's cottage when she knew he was out, and making a hurried search in his unlocked desk, found a letter to Barr from her lover. Forgetting to look first at the address, she read how a small fortune and a little estate in the country had been left by an aunt provided he took for his wife a distant cousin, whom she had practically adopted as her daughter. Ernest had seen the girl, liked her, and married her immediately, only letting his friend know when it was too late to give advice or reprove him about Liane.

While the girl was in the act of looking at an enclosed photograph of a pretty young woman, and before she had made sure of Ernest's address in France, Barr had come in and found her with the letter in her hand. He had taken it from her, and in pity for her despair had refrained from reproaches, and said it was too late to do anything now. Ernest was married and no good could come of reprisals.

Liane listened as if convinced, but though there were no promises of marriage in the letter she had, there were enough professions of love to distress the

bride if they could be brought to her eyes. Revenge of some sort Liane was determined to have, and though the letter had been taken away before she had time to fix the address in her mind, she knew that Ernest's property was in the district of Loire, and felt sure she could find him, if only she had plenty of money to carry her through the search. Unfortunately she had been extravagant, and had saved little or nothing. Desperate, the idea came to her that she might get leave for a day from Lady Hereward, take a diamond chain of her mistress's to London and have the stones replaced with paste. The brilliants were cut in such a way that they could easily be copied, and soon after Liane had fifty pounds in her possession. Lady Hereward's manner, however, changed toward her at the time, or she fancied it did; and, her guilty conscience making her fear that her mistress might be planning to have her arrested, she determined to "disappear," instead of giving a week's notice as she had intended. Arrived in France, she was not able after all to find Bayne, who had perhaps taken a French name, to put her off the track, in case she pursued him. Some of her money was stolen in a hotel, and the rest she spent in vain searchings for Ernest. Eventually she was driven to pawn her clothes, and, at the end of her tether at last, she tried to end her life with a dose of laudanum. She took too much, however, and recovered to find herself very ill in a hospital at Blois.

One of the doctors interested in her case (she having given a false name) believed that she had well-to-do relatives in England, and lent her money to buy a third-class ticket.

After reaching London she had but a shilling left, and started to walk the thirty miles to Riding St. Mary, hoping to sleep in a barn on the way, and expecting to get help from Barr at the end of the journey. On the way, between Havershall and Riding St. Mary, she was amazed and overjoyed to see Ernest Bayne on a bicycle. Standing directly in his path, she motioned him to stop, and he did so before recognizing her, changed as she was. Rather than make a scene and have her "go screaming after him," he listened to the story of her sufferings, pretended remorse, excused himself as well as he could, and said that, as he now loved his wife, he would do anything rather than she should hear of his treachery to another woman, one "so much below him socially." He had heard from Barr (who had by this time resigned his stewardship and gone away), that "Liane had disappeared," otherwise he would not have ventured to return to Surrey, necessary as it was that he should settle various matters and try to sublet Deodar Lodge. He admitted that he was on his way to the house, which was in charge of a caretaker, and swore to Liane that if she would "forgive and forget," and burn his letters, he would make her a present of three thousand

francs. Liane said that she would remain in the neighbourhood till she got the money, which he promised to give her as soon as he received three months' rent in advance for the furnished villa, which he expected to have next day, from a man who wanted the house. Ernest wanted her to go back to London, but when she refused, he suggested her staying at the old View Tower, where she could remain secretly, and would not be too uncomfortable for a short time.

The Tower had been a favourite trysting-place with them in the days of their love-making, when Ernest — a socialist only in name — had been ashamed of his humble sweetheart. He had taken a key lent by Sir Ian Hereward to Barr, who supposed that he had mislaid it, had it copied, and returned the old key to Barr's cottage. Often Liane had met him there, and they had talked of future plans (which Ernest probably never meant to carry out) sitting in the upper room; and he still had the copy of the original key. Having persuaded Liane to lodge there for one night, he left her in the shelter of the woods, cycled to Deodar Lodge, found the key, took her to the Tower, and as it was then evening, told her he would come next day with the money. She in her turn promised not to show herself for his sake, because of the talk there had been after her disappearance; but in reality she was anxious not to be seen on her own account, fearing Lady Hereward had discovered the substitution of the

paste for diamonds. Ernest brought food, when he brought the key, but Liane felt too tired and ill to eat, after her weary two days' tramp, in broiling weather.

The next morning passed, however, and Ernest did not appear. Nevertheless Liane did not despair, as he had seemed sincerely repentant, and warned her that there might be some delay in obtaining cash, if he received a cheque for the furniture. Lying on the old couch in the upper room of the Tower, just under the roof, Liane had felt "too tired after her two days' march to care what had happened." Exhausted and faint for lack of food, she slept a good deal, expecting that Ernest would put off coming till after dark. Suddenly she started up from a doze, on hearing two shots, one after the other. They had sounded very close, though she could not be sure whether they had been fired in the Tower or outside. She was so frightened, and her heart thumped so terribly that she was unable to move for a few minutes; but at last she could bear the suspense no longer, and summoned up courage to go downstairs and see what had happened.

After the shots which waked her, she had heard nothing; but the window of the upper room, unlike that on the first floor of the Tower, was unbroken, and closed, therefore she knew that there might have been sounds which failed to reach her ears.

She descended cautiously, and at the foot of the stairs saw the door of the room on the ground floor slightly

open. This surprised her; for she had tried it before going up to the top of the Tower the night before, and it was then locked. She peeped in, and was horrified to see the dead body of Lady Hereward lying at full length, with a pool of blood on the floor at her side. At first, Liane's only thought was to get away from so terrible a sight; but "something seemed to speak in her brain," reminding her of the beautiful jewelry Lady Hereward was in the habit of wearing. She assured herself it was not unlikely (as afterward proved to be the case) that Ernest intended to play her false. If he did, she would be penniless. Since Lady Hereward was certainly dead, and would never again want her jewels, it would not be like stealing to take them; and the person who killed her, whoever it was, would be suspected of the robbery.

Then Liane had tip-toed into the Tower, had tremulously taken Lady Hereward's rings, her brooch, and a bracelet, finding the body still quite warm. On the point of going away, she had spied a bead bag, and a gold case which "Miladi called her 'vanity box'" lying on the table, with a rolled-up pair of gray suede gloves. In the bead bag was a little gold chain purse containing four sovereigns and several shillings. Liane put this purse and the vanity box into her pocket, with the jewelry, but of course she had no reason to touch a revolver which she saw lying on the floor. It was a small revolver, and Liane had seen it at Mr.

Barr's some months before she left Friars' Moat. He had said, when she remarked it, that he had promised his mother, before her death, to keep a weapon of some sort always loaded in the house while living in the country. Once during the mother's lifetime, a thief had broken in, during the night. She had never quite got over the fright she suffered then, and because of it she exacted the promise from her son.

Having secured the jewels and money, panic overtook Liane, and leaving the door ajar as she had found it, she hurried away very fast, in spite of her exhaustion. In order not to be seen, she kept always to the shelter of the woods, selecting little by-paths, and met no one. An idea came to her that she might call at Deodar Lodge, and see if Ernest was there, or had been there, but she dared not, lest some one should catch her coming out of the forest.

She walked a very long distance, she did not know exactly how far, but at last had the courage to show herself in the village of Defford, and go to the railway-station.

The people she passed paid no particular attention to her, and she grew braver. She took a ticket to London, and went to Westbourne Grove, because she had had lodgings there before; but she did not venture back to the same street. She went to a house in Morton Crescent, where she saw a bedroom with attendance advertised, and gave the name of Madame Ernest.

She told the landlady that she was married to an English husband, a commercial traveller, who was away from her at present on business. She had paid, with Lady Hereward's money, for a week in advance, and the next morning had got her luggage from Charing Cross Station where she had left it on arriving in England some days before. When she read the paper, and saw what a sensation Lady Hereward's death had made, she was afraid to sell the jewelry, even the stones picked out of their gold settings, as she had intended to do. She lived on the money remaining of the four sovereigns, paying her lodgings in advance, by request, until all was gone. Then she resolved to pawn the little gold case, which was so like many others of its kind that she hoped it would not be remarked.

This, then, was the story of Liane Rodache, and the finding of the vanity box.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Well?" Nora Verney asked in a choked voice, when she saw that Miss Ricardo had read to the end of the two columns. "Will this help or harm him?"

The train had started, though the two women had been almost unconscious of slamming doors and the confusion of departure.

"Let me think," said Terry, still forgetful of the letter to Sir Ian, which by this time should have been begun.

"It was wicked of Liane to say that about the revolver," Nora exclaimed, unable to obey. "After all he had done for her, to say that it was his, when she might so easily have kept that to herself. No one would have supposed she knew anything about it, if she hadn't volunteered the information. And — yet ——"

She checked herself suddenly, biting her lip. It had been on the tip of her tongue to say: "Since Liane saw the revolver lying on the ground, after Ian and I had gone away from the Tower, that ought to prove he wasn't the murderer."

She had forgotten, for an instant, that Terry did not know what Sir Ian had known, since his last night at

St. Pierre de Chartreuse. But in the shock of remembering, Nora remembered something else as well — something which she, in common with all the world, had known since the first day of the inquest. No revolver had been found lying beside Lady Hereward's body, by the police. The murderer, who had thrown it down where Liane had seen it, must have returned later, taken the weapon, and hidden it.

There was only one name in her mind which coupled itself with murderer. She pictured Sir Ian going back to the Tower, where his dead wife lay staring into eternity, bending down over her to pick up the revolver — blood-stained, maybe — and hiding it where (Nora had read only yesterday in a French quotation from a London daily) Gaylor the detective had lately discovered it: thrust deep down in a rabbit-hole.

"Perhaps he had just decency enough in him not to *want* Ian suspected of his crime," she thought, "since it seems it really was Ian's revolver. And yet, if he didn't deliberately throw suspicion upon Ian to spare himself, why choose Ian's revolver?"

Her brain worked quickly, following the line of this question. How came Sir Ian to have the weapon? Had he actually taken it from Ian's house, long ago, meditating the murder, when opportunity should arise? Yet that could hardly be, she thought, remembering words which she had heard, trembling icily in the first-floor room of the Tower, that hot afternoon in June.

No. Here was a mystery she could not solve. Perhaps Ian Barr could solve it. But she would not be allowed to ask him. If Sir Ian Hereward continued to screen himself behind his incredible cowardice, she would have to speak. Yet speaking might create some new danger for Ian which she could not foresee, while such mysteries as this of the revolver existed even for her. She remembered the inquest, and shuddered at the thought of cross-examination. If she should ruin Ian, while sacrificing his love to save him?

"I think Liane's arrest must do Mr. Barr's case good," said Terry at last. "Of course, they may think she made up this tale about Ernest Bayne to help the man she really loves — don't look like that, dear! The truth can surely be proved. But if he's got blood in his veins, Bayne will come forward now, to exonerate his friend, who so nobly kept silence to spare an innocent girl from dreadful sorrow. There ought to be a great revulsion of feeling in Mr. Barr's favour. He is a loyal friend!"

"He is indeed!" answered Nora. "More loyal than you know," she added in a whisper drowned in the roaring of the train.

So they talked on, and Terry found no chance during the journey to write her letter to Sir Ian. Excited by the news of Liane's arrest, and by the discussion of probabilities with Nora, she lost sight of the importance which, till the moment of entering the train,

she had attached to finishing the promised letter between Dover and London. The moment, however, that she stepped out at Victoria Station, it came back to her again, more pressingly than before. She had a sharp sense of guilt and treachery in having let the opportunity pass by.

To be sure, she could stop at a District Messenger Office, scribble a few lines and send them off to Sir Ian's obscure hotel; but that would not be at all the same thing to him. He would know that she wrote in a hurry, that she had put him off because she had been thinking of some one or something else, until too late to carry out her promise fully. She could put no such "thoughts" as he had begged for into a hastily scribbled note.

Never in her life had Terry Ricardo failed a friend. This man whom she now called "friend" had failed her, as few men have failed women once loved; but all the more for that reason, perhaps, would she not fail him in return. What a base, even *common*, thing was revenge! Women like poor Liane Rodache took revenge upon men who had injured them. The Teresina Ricardos of this world acted otherwise.

Yet, what could she do? Terry asked herself.

She had kept her word to Sir Ian, about remaining in London, and had telegraphed to Maud, begging an invitation for Nora Verney. The invitation had promptly come back by wire. Then, from Paris,

Terry had been obliged to send off news of Nora's illness and consequent delay. This morning, in the haste of getting off, after the doctor's grudging permission, Terry had neglected to telegraph again, and Maud would not be looking for them to-night. She would expect to hear once more.

This, if they liked to take it so, would give Terry and Nora an excuse to remain in London after all; and Nora did wish it ardently. She had a dozen wild plans, one of which was to enlist some famous barrister on Ian Barr's side. She wanted to see one, the first thing in the morning. Would not Miss Ricardo be very good to her, and consent to stay the night in town?

This request gave Terry a new idea, at which she grasped eagerly. It seemed to her that she might go herself to Sir Ian's hotel, and speak to him. He was almost sure to be in, waiting for her letter, since he had appeared so anxious to receive it at the earliest moment, and she had half promised to send it to him by messenger. If she saw Sir Ian she could explain how she had failed to write, and surely he would rather see her, than have "thoughts" warm from her hand, set down on paper? Besides, she could tell him of Nora's wish, and ask him for the girl's sake to absolve her of her promise.

"At any rate, we will go to Brown's hotel and dine," she said to Nora. "I used always to be taken there as a very young girl, if we came up to town, and it's quiet,

I know. You must rest, and have something to eat before another journey, even a very short one, for you've scarcely touched anything to-day, and you begin to look white as a ghost. I will take you to Brown's, and then consult a friend about staying the night, or going on. Afterward I can telephone Maud, one way or the other, to White Fields, and if necessary, we can go down by the nine-fifty train."

"Why should it be necessary, dear Miss Ricardo?" Nora complained. But Terry did not answer.

They went straight to Brown's, and as Nora refused to dine without Terry, they had a hasty dinner immediately on arriving in a private sitting-room which Miss Ricardo engaged. There she left the girl surrounded with all the "extras" and "extra specials" obtainable, while she flashed off to Charles Street in a taxicab.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was true, as Sir Ian Hereward had said, that Harland's Hotel had no air of brightness or gaiety.

If the swift motion of the motor-cab, and the exciting thought that she was about to see Ian, had lifted for a few moments the load of oppression from Terry's breast, she felt the weight again, heavy and mysterious, as she stopped in front of the grim, unwelcoming façade.

The house had the look of an old private mansion turned into a hotel. The door was closed, and there was no smiling porter to fling it open as the cab drew up at the pavement. Terry pushed an electric bell; and somehow, as she touched it, the memory of her call at Friars' Moat swept suddenly over her, making her feel faint, almost sick. She had rung at the door then, and asked for Lady Hereward, who at that moment was lying dead in the View Tower. The footman had said "her ladyship was out, lunching at Riding Wood." Now, she would ask for Sir Ian. What would the answer be?

After a long moment, a discreet elderly servant came to the hotel door. Terry's voice sounded strangely in her ears, as she inquired if Sir Ian Hereward was in. The old man did not seem to notice

anything peculiar, however, and she was glad. He replied sedately that he would find out; but Terry was sure, from the reserved expression of the pinched face, that he knew Sir Ian to be in the hotel.

She followed the lean figure to the door of a moderate-sized reception-room, furnished clumsily in mahogany of mid-Victorian date. Though it was a warm July night, the crimson rep curtains were drawn, and there was a stuffy smell of ancient upholstery in the air.

"How can Ian choose such a place to stay?" she wondered, with the irritation of growing nervousness. If she had known the reason it would not have allayed her anxiety. Sir Ian was here because he had first met the woman who was to be his wife in this house. It had seemed suitable to him to return here now.

"What name, madam, if the gentleman is in?" the servant wished to know.

Terry started slightly. Ian would not like her to send up her name, which had figured beside his in the newspapers of late.

"Tell him that the friend who was to have written him a letter this evening, was obliged to call instead, and is anxious to see him for a *few moments*," said Terry, slightly emphasizing the last words, lest Sir Ian should think she meant to pay a long visit.

"Very well, madam."

The old man moved a few papers and magazines

on a white marble centre table, indicating occupation for the lady during his absence; and to humour him Terry sat down on the alleged easy-chair which he pulled into place. The gas lights in a huge gilt chandelier throbbed over her head, blazing in white globes; and a mirror in a gilt frame, over a hideously draped mantel, reflected the inappropriately graceful figure of the woman, as she subsided into the arm-chair by the table. Terry could observe her own image in this glass, as she sat mechanically turning the pages of an old *Illustrated London News*, and the crude overhead light was singularly unbecoming. It threw heavy shadows, and made hollows and lines where none existed. "I look as if I were dying," she said to herself; and then, glancing down at the open page, she started to see a portrait of Lady Hereward, as she had been many years ago, when Terry knew her first.

Involuntarily she drew her breath in sharply; and a sound at the door caused her to look up, as if guiltily.

"Ian!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. As she rose, an inadvertent push sent the newspaper off the table to the floor. It fell as she had opened it. Both stooped confusedly to pick it up, and Sir Ian saw his wife's picture.

"Oh, God, Terry!" he cried out, as he had cried to her that first day, when she had gone to his house and asked for the woman who lay dead in the woods.

She snatched the paper from him. "It opened

like that," she stammered. "I didn't mean — but you know, Ian, I had to come and see you. We must talk, just for a few minutes. Have you a private sitting-room? If you have, take me there. We can't talk here. People may be coming and going."

"Very well," he said, in a dull, almost conventional tone, not unlike that of the servant who had called him to her. His eyes were dull, too. There was no light of joy in them kindled at sight of her.

"Oughtn't I to have come?" she asked, suddenly embarrassed. "Are you sorry I have come?"

"No, no," he said. "I am surprised, that's all. I am — thinking what to do."

"I know what to do. Take me out of this room to some other," she said, her voice quivering with the nervousness she had been restraining all day. She glanced at him anxiously. Perhaps it only was the crude light, as it had been with her, but he, too, looked ill, ill enough to die.

"If you won't mind," he answered apologetically. "I have a sitting-room on this floor — not far off. Only I've been writing letters in it all day. Papers are scattered everywhere."

"As if it mattered!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Ian, if you don't take me at once — if I have to stop in this awful room one more instant, I believe I shall have hysterics."

Alarmed at her loss of that gracious self-control,

characteristic of her, something of his old manner came back. He guided her quickly along the corridor, and opened a door.

Thank Heaven, there was not so much light here, though the room was ugly enough. Terry sighed with relief in the dimness that toned soberly with olive-green walls and curtains.

"I think it was partly the horrid crimson in there, which got on my nerves. Blood colour!" she said with a little shiver; then regretted her words, and was stabbed by the answering look of pain in Sir Ian's death-weary face.

"Oh, Ian, whatever I do and say to-night seems wrong," she cried impulsively. "But my heart is right, and it brought me here to you. It has been all to-day and yesterday exactly as if you were calling me. I could hear your voice."

"The voice of my soul has been calling you," he said. "Yet I would not have brought you here to me, in body. I am not quite so selfish as that."

"If you had not wanted me — or needed me — your soul would not have called, nor mine answered as it has."

They looked at each other. Spirit spoke to spirit, from her eyes to his, from his again to hers. She read his thought, as she might have counted shells far down under water, clear as glass.

"I know now why you asked me to write you, as a last favour, and not to stop a night in London. You

were going to kill yourself," she said. "Isn't that true, Ian?"

"Yes," he answered. "It was the only thing to do."

"If you kill yourself, then you kill me also. For if you take your life I shall take mine. I have borne a good deal, but I couldn't bear that. I wouldn't even try to bear it."

"You don't know what you are saying, Terry!"

"Ah, yes, I know!"

"But you don't, I tell you, because you believe you are speaking to an innocent man. You are not. I am guilty of Millicent's death. In the sight of God I am her murderer."

"Ian!"

"You see! You did not know. Now you do know — you'll give me my freedom!"

"Not to die."

"To die, because by dying I can atone."

Terry shook her head. She hoped that he had merely worked himself up to a belief in his own guilt, through nights and days of torture beyond physical and mental endurance. But she felt that everything depended upon her, in this crisis. If God kept her brave and strong — above all, very calm — she might save him. But through God alone, she told herself with inward trembling, could she know how to do and say only the right things, now.

"Help me, God!" she prayed. "Thou hast

sent me to him for a purpose. Help me to carry it out, whatever it may be."

"One doesn't atone so easily," she said aloud. "You hurt me once, dreadfully, Ian. I have got over that — won past it. Surely you wouldn't hurt me so much more cruelly, in the end? What have I done to you that you should?"

"That is all but the most terrible part of it. You have done nothing," he groaned. "I thought always that you had, till that day — the day of her death. Then she confessed. I knew the truth for the first time — the truth about you in the past."

"She — *confessed?* Oh, but, Ian, it's the weaker side of me that questions you! What does the past really matter, between you and me?" Terry spoke so gently that her words, as they fell, were like balm. Yet for some wounds there is no balm.

"The past came up that day between my wife and me — and killed her," Sir Ian answered. He turned to the table under a green-shaded gas lamp, and pointed to a quantity of sheets of paper, closely covered with his fine, rather scholarly handwriting. "I was writing out my statement," he went on. "You will be surprised, perhaps, that I didn't do it at once — after her death. But — Terry, until a few days ago I thought it — more than possible that Ian Barr was guilty. I loved the fellow and wanted to save him."

"I saw that, at the inquest," she half whispered in her suspense and the anguish of her great sympathy.

"I wasn't sure what had happened. If I had told all, I couldn't have saved him unless he were able to produce an alibi; for, with circumstantial evidence strong against him, nothing I had to say could prove his innocence. And, as I said, I thought, in a passion of rage against her he might have — caused her death. Afterward, I could guess by what I suffered myself, he would have repented bitterly, when it was too late. Will you read my statement, Terry? You will see that, though I had to refer to the past, to explain what occurred between my wife and me, I didn't bring in your name."

"It wouldn't have mattered to me if you had, dear Ian," she answered. "And besides, if you had told everything it would perhaps only make things better instead of worse for me, after the stories Major Smedley has spread, and is spreading."

"The beast!" Ian muttered. "But, because of him, this confession of mine has not cost me what it would if there were no such person as Smedley to be reckoned with. If people name the woman I have referred to in my statement, putting two and two together, from Smedley's tattle, I think it can do you no harm. Will you read?"

"I would rather hear it all from your lips, letting

the story come in talk between us now," she answered, "unless you want me to read."

"I will tell you, then," he said. "I meant to write you a separate letter, the — last thing of all; posting it myself, so it shouldn't be found here. And don't think I should have left *your* letter, if you had written it, for other eyes to see. I would have ——"

"Don't talk about what you would have done!" she begged. "That's all over now. You have changed your mind for the better."

"If I had changed, it would not be for the better," he insisted. "When you hear all, Terry, it is *you* who will change. You'll admit, if you are as brave and frank as you always were, that if atonement is possible for me, it can only be through quitting this world. My confession, with what Nora Verney knows and can tell, will save Ian Barr. There can be no possible doubt of that — no fear of ultimate danger for him, or for this unfortunate Liane. Nora and Ian will be happy together, and forget their black days. I have made my will, and left Friars' Moat to him, as is only fair, considering his parentage, since I die without children. To you I've given nothing which can be put in a will, Terry. Yet I leave you my undying worship. It was yours unwaveringly, even when I believed you cruel and faithless. I could not take it from you. And it must live, it seems to me, even when I am in my grave. When I have finished the confession — it's

almost done — and told you what's in it, on my soul I believe you will bid me God speed out of this world."

"Tell me, then, and let me judge," Terry said, with the calmness which can dominate the soul only in supreme moments. "Sit down by me, on this sofa, and I will listen quietly, I promise."

She had felt in danger of collapsing, but she showed no sign of weakness. When they sat facing each other on the sofa, she held out her hand to him, as if to make a bridge of sympathy between their spirits; but he would not take it. "I'm not worthy of that sign of your trust," he said. "You would perhaps be sorry and drop my hand as the story went on. I couldn't bear it. It would be a sword in my heart — and, though I deserve the sword, I don't want the thrust to come from you. I told you that in God's sight I was guilty of her murder and I am."

"Begin at the beginning of the story. That is not the way," Terry said, with the gentle firmness which calmed him.

Sir Ian reflected for a moment. "I think the beginning of the story is at Mrs. Forestier's lunch. She told us you were in England, and that Maud was planning to bring you to call, as a surprise to us both. Millicent looked as if it wouldn't be an entirely agreeable surprise to her; and, Terry, it was far from agreeable to me. I worshipped you in spite of myself. I'd fought against that worship for thirteen years

and more, because — because — but I'll come to the reason later. I won't say more about it now.

"Millicent and I were going to walk home. She refused Nina's offer to send us back. She wanted to walk, she said; and when we'd left the house, she explained that she had something to tell me. When she added that it was very hard to tell, and I saw that she looked pale and distressed, I asked if it couldn't wait till another time, as we had to go home to see you and Maud. No, she answered, the thing must be said *before* we saw you. Then she suggested that we should walk by way of the Tower. She would be thinking over all the details of a story she had to tell, and the plateau of the Tower would be a good place to tell it, for it was so quiet there, one never need be afraid of meeting anybody.

"She was sometimes a little moody and morbid, so I didn't pay very great attention to her forebodings, even when she said that perhaps when I'd heard all I would hate her. She often asked me to repeat that I was really fond of her, making me say it over and over, and I could do so with truth. I'd never made any pretence from the first, of loving her as a man ought to love his wife, but I was genuinely fond of her, and the rest couldn't be helped — as she'd known long ago, from the day we first spoke of marrying. She was staying in this hotel with her mother then. It is where I met her first. Now you know why I'm here now.

"When we got to the Tower she looked horribly tired. I never saw her look so tired, but she said it was the heat, and she would be better after she had told me everything. She sat down on a seat — a seat made out of a log, and I stood close by. Neither of us dreamed that there was any one in the Tower, yet there — in the upper room, we now know, lay Liane asleep. And in the room on the first floor were Barr and Nora Verney."

"Ian! They were there!"

"Yes. Nora told me at St. Pierre that she and Barr had heard everything. That is why he left England, rather than bear witness against me; for there's just one thing they don't know. *They didn't see me go away.* They think I — but I have not come to that part yet. You see, it's hard to put all this straightforwardly and connectedly, as if into paragraphs."

"Go on from the time when Milly began to tell you her story."

"That's the hardest of all. She — well, to make it as brief as I can, Terry — she confessed then and there, that she'd lied to me when I first knew her in England — lied most hideously — about you. She started by saying she wouldn't have the courage to confess, even now, after all these years, if she weren't afraid that I might find out the truth in a way worse for her than telling it with her own lips. In other words, she feared it might come to me through you.

You see, she'd hoped and believed that you would spend the rest of your life in India. It was a great shock to learn you'd come home, and she'd have to meet you at once, or else perhaps rouse some suspicion that she wanted to avoid you. She had very little time to decide what to do; but, as she explained before I understood what was coming, she trusted to my affection for pardon. Her great love for me was to blame, but I could hardly reproach her for that. And we had lived for thirteen happy years together. I must remember these years, and what she had tried to be to me always, and so not to be too angry, but forgive her.

"That was the preamble, and I had no inkling yet of what was to come. Only, I said to myself: 'Poor girl, she little knows how far from happy those years have been to me. At best (though I've none but the kindliest feeling toward her) my life by her side has been just endurable. There's all the difference between happiness and resignation that there is between a dull gray sky and a blue one, radiant with sunshine.'

"I thought that, but I meant to keep the thought from her, as I always had. A few minutes later, however, I blurted it out, with tremendous consequences. God forgive me! I can never forgive myself."

"Go on from the place where you left off," Terry's gentle voice soothed him again, like rain as it falls upon a parched desert.

"Well, we were by way of being distant cousins;

and I knew, all those years ago, when I had to leave you, and go back to England, that she was your most intimate friend, although you were much younger. I couldn't resist talking of you to her, after we met — she and I — and she soon guessed how the land lay. One day she asked if I were really in love with you, and I answered 'yes,' but that you didn't want our engagement announced till your nineteenth birthday. Millicent seemed to hesitate, on hearing this, but presently said there was a thing it was her duty, as my cousin, to let me know, rather than that my life should be spoiled. Before I could answer, she warned me that you had no intention of marrying me. You had written her all about the affair, she said, and she couldn't help being indignant about the way you had acted. You were her friend, but I was her cousin, and blood was thicker than water. 'Terry was only playing you off against some one else, my poor Ian,' Milly explained. 'She wanted Lord Hatherley, and was trying to bring him to the point of making him jealous of you.'

"Of course I answered that she must be mistaken. I had perfect faith in Miss Ricardo. 'In justice to me, you must read Terry's letter,' she exclaimed; and with that, before giving me time to think, she whipped a letter out of her pocket. I could have sworn on my life that it was your handwriting — your writing that made my heart beat to see, even on an envelope. I

oughtn't to have read one word, but she gave it to me open in the middle and I couldn't help catching sight of my name and Hatherley's, close together. That's no excuse, I know. But hardly conscious of what I was doing, I read on and on, until sentence after sentence seemed branded on my brain in letters of fire. Apparently you were telling Milly all about our acquaintance, and saying it was so 'silly of Captain Hereward to be taken in by my nonsense, that really he'll deserve all he gets.' The letter went on to explain that you were going to 'let me down lightly,' by allowing our correspondence to fizzle out slowly. You put me off by one excuse or another, which I was green enough to take seriously, not realizing that you were bored to death by my solemn face and puritanical ways. It was always a great effort to keep from shocking me, I was such a grim old stick. Fool that I was — I believed then — believed what I thought were your own words. My miserable vanity was wounded to the quick. I had always heard you were a flirt. It was true, I said to myself. You should never be bored by hearing from me again. And that same day I proposed to Millicent."

As he finished the story, he covered his face with his hands, his breath coming hard and fast. Terry touched him softly on the shoulder.

"I don't blame you, Ian," she said, "if it seemed to be my handwriting."

"I could have sworn to it," he groaned. "I never doubted from that day, till the afternoon when Millicent confessed that she had written the letter herself — imitating your writing after much practice — 'to disgust me with you,' as she said, 'because she loved me, and felt she must die if I didn't belong to her.' Well," and Sir Ian laughed bitterly — "the rest was easy, for she was a clever woman, and I was a mad fool in those days. After that, she had her way. Nothing mattered, I thought. You know what happened. I never wrote to you again. I sent back two letters unopened, and — I married my cousin Millicent, as soon as I could. I fancied her a sweet, saintly sort of being, and I told myself I ought to think I was lucky if she liked me enough to take me as I was, burnt up with love for a girl I believed unworthy. She realized that I didn't care for her in the right way, but she said she would do her best, and win my whole heart. What true happiness could we have expected?

"She told me everything, sitting there by the View Tower, breaking down and sobbing, begging me to hear her excuses, and how she had been dying for me, how she had been tempted — when I interrupted. I don't know what I said, but I remember crying out that she had done a thing no man could forgive — that she'd made me a dishonourable brute to the one woman I ever loved; that I'd never cared for her, never been happy with her for a moment, and that now I

loathed her from the bottom of my heart. I think I said my life had been without a single ray of joy; but that now, knowing what I knew, it would be worse than hell if I went on living with her. I couldn't do it, I warned her. 'For God's sake, don't make a scandal,' she implored. 'Anything but that! Spare me that.'

"'We can remain under the same roof, if you choose,' I said, 'though I'd rather go away and never see your face again. But whatever you decide, nothing can induce me to live with you again as your husband.'"

"That seemed to strike her to the soul. 'Kill me, if you like!' she moaned, sobbing the most agonizing sobs. Even then I ought to have been sorry for her, outraged as I was. But my heart seemed seared. I could feel no pity.

"'You deserve to die,' I answered. And then I turned and went away, leaving her there alone. How I could do it, I don't know, but I did. I was hardly human. Those were the last words we spoke to each other. I walked home mechanically, not caring where I went, or what I might do, until — I saw you. You know now what I was suffering, Terry. To come on you like that, just after I had found out the truth — such a truth! But even so, there is no excuse for me — none."

"We're not seeking excuses, Ian, you and I," Terry said. "I knew you were suffering. But of course I

could not guess. I, too, had suffered. I am glad, now, that I suffered — because I can better understand you."

"You are an angel," he answered, dry-lipped. "I never deserved you. Well, so much the worse for me! We talked, you and I, at the house. Millicent did not come. As your influence slowly humanized me, I began to feel a little — a very little — remorse for my harshness to her; for, after all, as she said, her sin had been for love's sake. I asked myself what I would do, if I were a woman, and in her place. The answer came quickly. I would take my own life. I thought that was what she would do, and when I grew obsessed with the idea, I went to look for her at the Tower. She had opened the door, somehow, and gone in. As I expected, she was dead. Her face was awful to see. Never have I ceased seeing it for an instant since. I remembered her words, 'no scandal!' and I decided that it would be better for her sake — for yours, too, since any true explanation of the scene which had brought about her death would involve telling our story — I decided it would be better to hide the revolver, which was lying near her hand.

"My only idea then was that she had killed herself because of my words. I didn't recognize the revolver as Ian Barr's, but I knew I had seen it, and fancied she might have owned the thing, without mentioning it to me. Now, I am sure she must have taken it from his

house, since it seems certain it was his — how long ago, I can't say. She went to see him, I know, and accused him of villainy to Liane. Perhaps she took it then, Heaven knows why."

"Maybe with a good motive," suggested Terry. "She must have spoken very hardly to Mr. Barr to induce him to resign his place — which meant his postponing his marriage indefinitely, if not giving it up. No doubt she thought she was doing her duty. But maybe, seeing the revolver, she feared, as he was a passionate man, he might end his life with it, and it would be partly her fault. Then, afterward, very likely she carried it about on the lonely walks which Maud says she often took."

"Possibly you are right. She could have had it in that hand-bag with her handkerchief and purse. I saw the bag, and her gloves, lying on the table. I thought she had laid them there deliberately before taking her life. I didn't notice then her jewelry being gone, or think about it at all. The look on her face was my punishment — though not enough, not enough! I didn't believe, as others did afterward, that she had seen her assassin after falling. I thought she had looked up, as if to Heaven, with a last prayer for mercy, as she died there alone, knowing herself hated by me, whom she loved; and I think so still. But, when things began to come out at the inquest, I half changed my mind. I fancied that, after all, Ian

Barr might have come while she was in the Tower. And I kept that idea in my head, till Nora Verney swore to me the other night that she and Barr were together till long after the shots were fired. Then I went back to my old opinion again. And I know that I am right. Millicent died by her own hand, because I had crushed her desire to live. But, because I crushed it, I am guilty of her death, and I am not fit to live. I must atone. Am I not right?"

"You are right. You must atone," Terry answered.

"Thank you for your courage. I trusted you to tell me the truth."

"But you must atone by a life of repentance for a moment of madness — not by dying. If you die, you will be guilty of my death and your own, even more than Millicent's. For her you did not mean to kill. I could not live if you took your own life, Ian, because I love you, even as you have loved me. I have always loved you, in spite of all, in spite of myself."

He bent down and kissed the hem of her dress. "I am not worthy to do this," he said. "Oh, Terry, I am haunted, haunted. If I don't die, how shall I lay her ghost?"

"Live, Ian, for me; and by God's aid, I will help you to lay that ghost," Terry promised him, inspiration in her eyes, and a love stronger than death or sorrow. "Milly has forgiven you," she said. "And I — have never had anything to forgive."

CHAPTER XXX

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY MAJOR SMEDLEY TO HIS FRIEND MRS. EARLE, IN CALCUTTA.

. . . Amateurs are so foolish about such things. Look at Ian Hereward, a man of intelligence in some ways. He actually seemed to suppose that by that famous "statement" of his, which aroused such a sensation, he was freeing Barr from all possible suspicion, and tearing away the veil of mystery from Millicent Hereward's death. Why, a young and inexperienced boy might have known better! But that shows, when a thing comes very near to you, you lose the "point of view," so to speak. It's like holding the palm of your hand close in front of your eyes. Not only are you prevented from seeing it clearly but it shuts out everything distant from your sight.

They say Wilbraham, who was one of the best legal minds in England, advised Hereward that he would do harm to himself as well as fail to clear Barr, if he made the statement, but Hereward obstinately persisted. The gossip is that Miss Ricardo urged him to take the course, and I for one believe the story, as it would be like her, don't you think? Not that I

wish to speak against her to you, especially now that you have become the wife of her brother-in-law, over whose household and children she ruled for so many years before you were chosen to reign as queen over the fortunate kingdom. But I know at one time, whether or no you may now have changed your mind in her regard, we agreed pretty nearly in our opinion of that (more or less) young lady. And in any case you'll admit that at best she is inclined to be quixotic and dramatic in her views of morality and conduct generally.

They say "two heads are better than one." Personally I think that would depend on the heads. If Hereward and Miss Ricardo put theirs together over this statement of his, it's not much to the credit of the conjunction that they didn't see certain points of objection, unassisted by the lawyers. I should have put my finger on them at once, if they had asked my advice.

You see, where Ian Barr is concerned, the statement could do him little, if any good, in a court of law. Bringing out the fact that he was in the View Tower at the time of Lady Hereward's death, indeed, was likely to tell against him. To be sure, there was the girl Nora Verney to swear that she was with him, and that they were together in an upper room when they heard the shots. But as she had perjured herself the first day of the inquest, her evidence wasn't much

good to Barr. There was no proof but their own word that Barr didn't go downstairs and shoot Lady Hereward, when he had heard her voice and knew she was alone in the Tower. He, unassisted, couldn't have proved that she had taken his revolver, and was in the habit of going about with it in a handbag when she walked in the woods. Was the jury likely to believe that Barr left England with the one object of screening his late employer, Sir Ian Hereward, and that it was entirely for Hereward's sake, not at all for his own and Nora Verney's, that he intended to keep silent when arrested and brought back from France? Not they. Circumstantial evidence was strong against him.

On the other hand, there was no proof except Sir Ian's word that he *had* gone out of the Tower before the shots were fired. In his statement he actually called attention to the fact that neither Barr nor Miss Verney heard him go, and that they both believed him guilty of murder.

As he made the case stand, it was simply a question for the jury to decide whether his word should be taken or not. If not, which had killed Millicent Hereward, her husband, or the young man whose prospects in life she had tried to destroy?

As for the suicide theory, if it hadn't been for what happened afterward, it would have been very difficult if not impossible to establish. As you know (for I sent you the papers with that passage marked), two

doctors gave it as their opinion on the first day of the inquest that it was unlikely the poor woman had killed herself. Eventually, after all these new developments, when they were recalled, they did agree in saying that a vain and self-conscious woman might put an end to her life by placing the revolver in the position indicated by the wound. That, a first shot aimed at the side having been deflected by a steel corset, a would-be suicide might have feared to try the same spot again, and have chosen a spot between the throat and the chest, sparing the face and the throat itself from disfigurement. Still, who was to prove what might or might not have gone on in Millicent Hereward's mind? Some of her women friends, Mrs. Forestier for instance, did volunteer evidence that she had been exceedingly vain, or words to that effect, doing all she could to keep her looks as she grew older; and her maid, Kate Craigie, testified to the same peculiarity. But all that was in the realm of supposition. And my firm opinion is, and will continue to be, that if this Anglican Priest Father Tennant hadn't come forward, with what to my idea was equivalent to violation of the confessional, either Ian Hereward or Ian Barr would have had to suffer for the crime of murder. Even if a jury hadn't dared to convict, there would always have been whispers.

As for me, I am asking myself whether there could

have been collusion between Sir Ian and this priest; whether Hereward had heard from him, and knew what he was likely to do, before he ventured to take the course he did. I can't so far persuade any one else to take this view, however, I confess, though I have had some interesting discussions on the matter with men of importance, at my clubs.

Father Tennant is fortunate in being revered by men and worshipped by women. You know the type? It is particularly successful nowadays. Fashionable women love to hear their own follies denounced. They flock to this man's church; and his conduct in giving Millicent Hereward away (that is what I call it), when she is in her grave, is condoned by his admirers. They uphold his defence, that, not being a Roman Catholic, there is no "seal of the confessional." They say that he was justified in revealing her confidences on the plea that everything she had told him was already known to the world, from her husband's statement, except the fact that she threatened, if ever found out and not forgiven, to put an end to her life. Also because she would "herself have wished it," since it was to free the innocent from suspicion.

Well, all I can say is that it's lucky for both Barr and Hereward that poor Millicent's remorse had forced her to open her heart to a priest. Lucky for them, too, that in opening it she didn't forget to hint at her own intentions in the event of certain contin-

gencies, and even to add obscurely, "I have secured the means, if I ever need to use them."

The two are safe from the clutches of the law, thanks to Father Tennant (who will in the future be burdened with fewer confidences from his female adorers, I prophesy), but they will never be safe from gossip. Wherever they go, whatever they do — unless they change their names, they will be marked men. I don't envy them! Indeed, I am sorry for young Barr and the girl who, I hear, intends to marry and go to America with him, to "begin over again." But as for Hereward, he hasn't much sympathy from me, and so I tell every one. His cruel repulse of that unfortunate creature when she pleaded to him for pardon undoubtedly caused her death. I wouldn't have that on my conscience. But I never thought him a man of deep feeling, and I have known him since his youth. He always was a haughty, arrogant fellow, and certainly has nothing to be proud of in the way he treated Miss Ricardo. As you say in your letter, he did not, to be sure, mention her name in his statement; but *every one* knew to whom he referred. Their engagement years ago was an open secret, as I have told you before — and have told others. Nevertheless, she seems to bear him no grudge. If I could see her, I would try to find out of what she was supposed to accuse herself in the forged letter which poor Millicent Latham showed Hereward, in the hope of

alienating his love from the fair Teresina. It would be interesting to know. Also, *whether the letter was really forged.* I am mooting that theory now, and it is exciting interest among my friends.

The latest gossip is, that in spite of everything there is an understanding between Miss Ricardo and Hereward, which eventually may end in marriage. I wonder? Nothing is too strange to be true. But if this is not the exception which proves the rule, Miss Ricardo must be a brave woman.

THE END

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